STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION.

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A TREATISE ADDRESSED ESPECIALLY TO RELIGIOUS.

ORIGINALLY WRITTEN IN LATIN

BY

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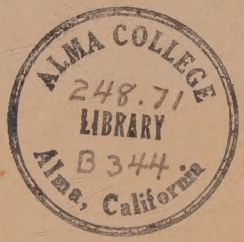

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STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION.

PART I.

MOTIVES THAT SHOULD ENCOURAGE A RELIGIOUS TO ASPIRE TO THE PERFECTION OF HIS STATE.

CHAPTER I.

CALL TO RELIGION.

1. "THE Spirit breatheth where it will," and the Spirit of God moves souls to aspire after perfection by divers ways. One feels that he is called to higher contemplation; another to an active life: "Thou art careful, and art troubled about many things." Both are inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit. Many others devote themselves to both the active and the contemplative life, laboring not only for their own perfection, but also for the salvation of the neighbor; and this is the best, the most perfect.

Yet it is one and the same Spirit that guides all and, by widely divergent ways, leads to one and the same end.

2. Every one must resolutely go forward on the way by which the Spirit conducts him if he would please God and attain the perfection determined by Him.

Whoever wastes his opportunities for perfecting himself, or embraces them sluggishly, will with difficulty gain life eternal, and merit the happiness promised the true servant of God.

If he does not follow the path pointed out to him by the Holy Ghost, he will, with very great danger to his soul, seek another more in accord with his own tastes and inclinations.

Many are called by the way of tribulation and persecution. Such would greatly err were they to seek peace before the time.

3. Many are called by the way of poverty and lowliness. These would run great risks should they strive after a life of comfort and honor.

Others are invited to tread the path of

silence and seclusion. Should they remain in the noise and bustle of the world, hardly shall they be saved. In short, one treads this way, another that, but all under the workings of the same Spirit, whom they follow, and by whom they must let themselves be guided.

4. Do not imagine you have done anything great because you have followed the Good Spirit in the choice of your state of perfection. It is God who, by your call and election, has shown you extreme kindness.

Many are like yourself called; but only a few are like you chosen. It is, therefore, a great mark of favor that He has not only called you like others, but has really chosen you for so holy a state of life.

It is, also, a signal mark of grace that He has relieved you of earthly cares, so that quite untrammelled you can live for your sanctification.

What a favor that He has given to others the earth and earthly goods, reserving for you Himself and heavenly possessions!

5. Yet you are not secure from all danger,

and you cannot be certain of your salvation; hence be not proud or negligent in God's service.

Indeed, if you do not fervently strive for the perfection to which your state calls, clothing yourself in time of temptation with the buckler of penance, you have no security of perseverance in your calling. St. Peter admonishes us to "make sure our election by good works" (Pet. i. 10).

The Prophet had said before him: "But such as turn aside into bonds, the Lord shall lead out with the workers of iniquity" (Ps. cxxiv. 5).

Whoever does not try to advance daily in virtue renders his call and election very weak and insecure.

CHAPTER II.

WE MUST STEADILY AND FERVENTLY AIM AT ACQUIRING VIRTUE.

1. We must never think that a time will come in which we can give up or even relax our efforts after perfection.

Only by long and vigorous conflict can virtues be acquired, though they are very easily lost through indolence and indifference.

However far advanced, you are not yet perfect; for it is written: "He that is just, let him become more just," and: "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Apoc. xxii. 11; Matt. v. 48).

Had we lived over a hundred years in the Order, we should always have something to amend, for we are and we shall always remain human, tainted with evil inclinations.

These may be pruned and kept down, but never entirely uprooted.

2. We do not know what determinate views God has in our regard, nor what punishment awaits our negligence and inconstancy.

We do not know whether the salvation of many souls depends upon our progress in perfection. God may demand their blood at our hands.

Neither do we know what violent temptations may assail us, the overcoming of which will require greater perfection.

3. In striving after perfection, we dare not set a limit beyond which we are unwilling to go.

He who unhesitatingly draws such a line, does God an injustice, and puts himself in great danger.

As God has called many others, whom we with the Church honor as saints, so, too, He calls us.

As those heroes of virtue have followed the divine call, not wavering in the pursuit of virtue, so should we also walk worthy of

our vocation, supported by firm hope, and serving God joyfully.

4. None advance more quickly than they who in humility give themselves up wholly and entirely to God, refusing Him no sacrifice.

Nothing is more pleasing to God than humble confidence and magnanimity.

O how quickly we should reach perfection were we liberal towards God !

How soon we should be saints if we joyfully and right willingly said with St. Paul: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?" (Acts ix. 6).

5. But this, it is true, presupposes a heart free from self-seeking, a heart alert for humility.

We must, therefore, before all, purify our heart of every sinful habit and every disorderly inclination in order to prepare in it a dwelling for God. The Lord will then say : "I shall go to this soul and take up My abode with her, and My indwelling shall be eternal."

CHAPTER III.

THE MULTITUDE OF OUR FAILINGS SHOULD INCITE US TO GREATER EFFORTS AFTER PERFECTION.

1. EXAMINE yourself closely as to how much evil you have done and are still doing, how little good you have done, and how imperfect that little is.

At what have you hitherto been aiming in your multiplied cares and labors? To whom have you devoted your time, your labor, and your strength? To Me and to your own soul, asks the Lord, or to vanity and sensuality?

Behold approaching the moment that will open your eyes. Then will you find in your hands no good works, or at least very few, with which to open the kingdom of heaven.

But many sins will be there instead, for which you must atone in the fires of the other life.

2. How many years since you assumed the obligation of aspiring after perfection! Have you lived one month, yea, even one day, perfectly?

You should have been, from day to day, more intimately united to Me by the consideration of heavenly things. But alas! you have not devoted one single hour wholly to Me.

Till now, what have you done or suffered for Me? What proof of great-hearted or heroic love have you given Me?

And yet what a consolation on your deathbed, to have accumulated, by the exercise of penance and the other virtues, merits whereby to satisfy for your faults and sins.

3. Consider, also, how impatient you are, how unwilling to be thrust aside or put down. How easily you break out into complaints, and how burdensome you become to others by your groans and lamentations!

How vain and immortified you are ! You desire to be borne on the hands of others, and, even in the school of humility, you are on the alert to rise in the esteem of others.

How slow you are in girding yourself with the armor of penance ! how sensual in gratifying your appetite for food, drink, and sleep ! how anxious about your clothing, your dwelling ! how solicitous to avoid everything that is not agreeable to the flesh and the senses !

How indefatigable you are in seeking after vanity ! how slow and indolent in the pursuit of virtue !

How regardless you are of others ! how repulsive in your intercourse with them ! how inconsiderate and wounding in your replies ! how dull and unwilling in obeying ! how unrestrained in your fancies ! how light and dissipated at prayer ! how little inclined to silence ! how imprudent and arrogant in speech ! how indiscreet and worldly in writing ! how inconstant in your thoughts ! how disedifying, and even scandalous, in your de-

portment ! how affected in your conversation !

How often you are irritable and angry with your associates ! how seldom do you give them an example of patience and humility ! how often do you allow yourself to be overcome by sluggishness ! how rarely do you force yourself to pray or meditate devoutly !

How often do you complain of superiors or equals ! how uncommon for you to think seriously of your own faults and shortcomings that you may correct them !

How often do you omit doing good through fear of the world or human respect ! On the contrary, how seldom you avoid sin for love of Me !

4. For how many of your own sins or those of others, known or unknown, have you done penance ? How many do you daily add to their number, all of which must be cancelled by penance in the other world !

How can you remain negligent and inconstant ? There is question of your own personal interest, hence, too, there is

question of being seriously in earnest. Put your hand to the work with all your heart.

If you have any love for yourself and zeal for My glory, you will endeavor by a fervent life, daily to make some progress.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THOUGHT OF PURGATORY LEADS TO IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE.

1. How long, think you, will you be detained in that purifying abode? Only a very few souls, who were particularly fervent in mortifying, and assiduous in purifying, their heart, have deserved to be entirely exempt from the punishment of purgatory.

If you took the pains to imitate them, you might hope for a short sojourn in its flames, a speedy entrance into the kingdom of light and glory.

If you do not mortify your flesh and resist your craving after honor, you will have to suffer much and long.

2. Atone now for your sins while there is yet time. Deny yourself, for this is better for you.

Penance in time is easier and more meritorious.

He that waits for purgatory to cleanse and purify himself, will have much more and much sharper suffering to undergo, and yet merit nothing by it, because for him the time of merit has passed.

3. Do you think that what you reserve for purification in that terrible fire is inconsiderable? Do not deceive yourself: "I will search Jerusalem with lamps" (Soph. i. 12).

What you regard as great and meritorious is often in My eyes rejected and deserving of punishment.

Nothing impure or defiled can enter into the holy state. This is a holy place and the dwellers therein are all pure.

4. It is, therefore, better for you to do meritorious penance now than to burden yourself with new sins, for you have much to amend.

If you exert yourself now to pay your debts, I shall be satisfied with little, perhaps with a single talent; but if you defer payment till the next life, I shall purify you ac-

cording to strict justice, as gold is purified in the furnace. You shall not go free till you have paid the last farthing.

Behold, now you can with slight cost, with little self-imposed penances, cancel great debts, escape frightful punishments, and prevent the danger of eternal damnation.

Be wise, then. Practise reasonable self-love, that you may not regret your indiscretion when it is too late.

Try to enter by the narrow gate, be not deterred by difficulties, combat your evil inclinations, do away with bad habits, heed not the gibes of fools and weaklings.

For weaklings and fools are they who through incredible indifference prefer to fall into the hands of My justice rather than, by timely penance and satisfaction, to secure My mercy.

CHAPTER V.

FROM PERSEVERING EFFORTS AFTER VIRTUE SPRINGS PROFOUND PEACE.

1. "For My yoke is sweet and My burden light" (Luke xi. 30)—sweet for those that take the yoke upon them, and light for those that bear the burden.

If you consider the yoke only in a natural sense without shouldering it, it will be impossible for you to feel either its sweetness or its lightness.

You often complain of it, you fancy it an onerous burden, because you have never yet rendered Me a service wholly undivided.

Make up your mind, once for all, that you will truly and fervently reform; then what deep peace, what great interior comfort you will find!

The world and all its sensual enjoyments would appear to you unsavory, if you had only once tasted heavenly sweetness.

But because you are imperfect and negligent, you cannot conceive delight so great for "The sensual man, indeed, comprehends not what is of the spirit."

2. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill" (Matt. v. 6).

May you then so hunger and thirst that once understanding the truth of this, My promise, you may be so satiated with sweetness as not to turn again to the consolations of the world.

Whence comes that resistance in your heart? Does it not proceed from the irregular desires of your members? Fight against those desires, and with the victory you will also win peace.

3. How foolish to seek exterior peace! Earthly joys cannot satisfy the heart. When passed, they are like so much smoke that irritates and tortures.

I designedly mingle bitterness with

earthly consolations, that your soul may not find rest in them.

I daily permit many temptations and trials, that they who have strayed far from My way may the more quickly and gladly return home.

When, on the contrary, any one comes to Me with confidence, carrying his cross and for My sake despising all things, he will realize how vain and uncertain is all earthly consolation; he will find greater satisfaction in his conscientious sorrow, in his victory over self, than the whole world could offer him in its flowing cup of seeming joy.

4. Come, then, put your hand to the work. Fear not! War to your passions! Away with effeminacy and foolish weakness!

Pray and meditate devoutly. Read the lives of the saints, think on your last end, let the purification of your heart be your greatest concern, and you will find peace.

Be humble and mortified, and you will find peace.

Be patient and fervent, and you will find peace.

Be resolute and persevering, and you will find peace.

If you carry My yoke and My burden in this manner, you will exultantly receive the hundredfold and possess life eternal.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FEAR OF HELL SHOULD BE AN INCENTIVE TO THE ACQUISITION OF VIRTUE.

1. WHOEVER thinks himself to stand, let him beware lest he fall. Have not many abandoned the way of salvation, because they did not fear the danger of falling ?

If they had frequently thought on the punishments of hell, very probably they would not have fallen, or, at least, having once fallen, they would have risen more promptly.

Do not mistake. Though you have many reasons to hope for the best, yet you dare not long lose sight of the cause of holy fear. Neither the call to religion, the religious habit, nor even the dignity of the priesthood, gives security. Not a few have

begun well, but ended badly, because of the wrong notion that their salvation was already secured.

2. Think what a misfortune it is for a man, through his own fault, to be deprived of every good thing and to suffer all kinds of pain in the company of devils; to enjoy fleeting amusements contrary to God's commandments and, in consequence, to dwell in eternal flames; to seek vain consolation here on earth, and, as a penalty, to fall into the bitter torments of hell.

Think of the sufferings of the martyrs. How varied and painful were the torments they endured! And yet all these taken together are nothing in comparison with the pains of hell.

There was much to sustain the courage of the martyrs: the greatness and nearness of the reward; their ardent love for Christ; the peace of their pure and good conscience; the grace of God, which sweetened every torture, and the holiness of the cause for which they suffered. But nothing of all this is even imaginable in hell.

3. The punishments of hell have no merit, no purification, but only chastisement.

No love there alleviates suffering; on the contrary, hatred and despair increase it. No movement of grace there consoles or refreshes; on the contrary, God's almighty wrath gives a fiercer sting to the lash of His punishments.

The remorse of a bad conscience gives the damned no moment of rest, for their gnawing worm shall never die.

How awful to be thrust by God into the fiery and sulphurous pool with all other evil-doers, to be tormented by devils.

O how bitter must be the memory of the past, the thought of the actual present and that of the unending future! The sinful enjoyment has long since passed; it lasted but a moment; but the punishment will never cease.

How differently will the lost soul then judge of the first occasion of his damnation! It once appeared to him so trifling; but now, alas! he realizes in himself of what infinite importance it was!

4. Do not think, my brother, that this regards only seculars. You, too, are human; therefore have compassion on yourself.

Although you should work miracles, do not for all that presume. Be cautious; your fall would be so much the more dangerous, the higher you stand.

They who in life nurtured their body most carefully will when dead so much the sooner exhale the odor of putrefaction. So it shall fare with them who once relished the richness of heavenly food, but who gave up the spiritual life to plunge all the more quickly and unconsciously into the abyss. The proverb says truly: "*Corruptio optimi pessima*"—"The corruption of the best becomes the worst."

The remedies that restore others to health are of little benefit to those unfortunate reprobates. What terrifies others has no power to move them; they have become callous.

5. Ah, then, how truly humble should we be! It is, indeed, possible that we may fall and be eternally lost.

Under this conviction, should we not strive to purify ourselves from our sins that, when weighed in the balance, we may not be found wanting ?

How conscientiously we should obey inspirations from above, making our life correspond to our calling, that we may not deserve to have our lot cast with hypocrites.*

* The lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not, and at an hour he knoweth not: and shall separate him, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. xxiv. 50, 51.)

CHAPTER VII.

IN STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION, RELAXATION IS DANGEROUS.

1. BEWARE of swerving from the path of perfection. It would result in evil to you. You have renounced all the possibilities of this world's goods; consequently, a great reward is laid up for you, and before long it shall be dealt out to you. Turn not back, then, to what you have so generously renounced. That would be to your great disadvantage.

Let not what is tiresome in the combat frighten you, nor the unvarying weariness of its progress discourage you. Were it ever so much more monotonous, still it will not last long. Life passes, and "the shadow of this world with it." Sooner than you think the terminus will be reached, and the payment of the reward made.

Go resolutely forward on the way pointed out to you, and be not solicitous. Your tears will be turned into joy, and your joy no man shall take from you.

But if you should slacken your pace, at once you become weak, you are in danger of falling, even though your neglect may seem only trifling.

2. Take warning. Are you to-day somewhat tepid and wilfully distracted in prayer? To-morrow you will be much more lukewarm and distracted.

If to-day you neglect to mortify your senses, to-morrow you will find penance all the more difficult. If to-day you allow useless and trifling occupations to steal away your time, to-morrow you will be still less able to rid yourself of them, or of others even more embarrassing.

This is a well-merited punishment for those who shirk the trouble of the conflict. They have the grace to be victorious, but neglecting it, they deserve to have that abundance taken from them.

3. You must not give up the fight, until

you have entirely overcome your enemies and gained the victor's crown.

The devil by alluring into false security, lays snares for many whom for long years he has vainly tormented with temptations.

Such a feeling of assurance engenders carelessness; consequently, the fervor of the religious life begins to decline. The pious custom of frequently raising the mind heavenward is given up, God withdraws His most powerful protection, a pernicious attraction for freedom is awakened, nature is excited, the will becomes weak, the senses revolt more openly, the commission of faults daily increases, the soul is tending towards perdition.

The mind of man is inclined to evil from his youth. Take from it the bridle and the senses will revolt to your destruction.

I have said: "If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself" (Mark viii. 34). "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Matt. xi. 12).*

* A widely circulated, but undoubtedly incorrect, interpretation of Matt. xi. 12. The correct translation of

For if you do not conquer your passions, they will conquer you, and bring you under the servitude of Satan.

4. He that does not endeavor to make progress, has already begun to go back, and that more rapidly than he thinks.

If you will hold on to what you have, aim at acquiring more.

Great is the weakness, great the inconstancy of the human will. It is something wonderful, if, by aiming at higher perfection, you maintain your present *status*.

Nothing is stable in this transitory life; everything is subject to manifold changes. God alone is immutable. "In Him there is no change, no shadow of inconstancy."

Man, on the contrary, is like bad soil. It

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this text might be: And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away. And the literal sense: The kingdom of the Messias, whose coming John preached, is from His appearing until the present hour subject to the violent hostility of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who do all in their power to prevent the people having faith in Me, and from entrance into My kingdom, the Church of the New Covenant, effectually robbing them of the goods of My kingdom.

is impossible for him to remain any length of time free from weeds, if he does not carefully cultivate every virtue in the soil of his heart. He is like a boat floating with the stream, which can be brought to a standstill only by a strong arm rowing with powerful strokes against the current.

5. Take courage. If you encounter difficulties, be brave and persevering in overcoming them.

Very frequently what interrupts your spiritual exercises is nothing of importance. Were you firmer in opposing such trifles, you would find the struggle easier and shorter than you before imagined.

Watchfulness and resolution render combat short and light. The contrary is the result of sloth and tepidity.

Whoever begins by bravely vanquishing sensuality and temptation, confounds all other attacks of the evil one.

He who spares himself on all occasions, and is greedy for vain distractions, grows daily weaker and has less strength to conquer himself. Thus it happens that he soon yields.

The evil one would not easily overcome you if, once for all, you shook off sloth, and, with serious determination to fight, sought the help of God in humble prayer.

Yes, such a course would even weaken your adversary. He would take to flight through dread of your making his temptations the occasion of accumulating greater merit.

But, through faint-heartedness, you prefer rest to combat. Perhaps, you think, having fought much, you have now little to fear from your adversary. Ah ! if this be the case, you will find to your cost how greatly you have encouraged and strengthened him.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE MUST LAY UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN.

1. Be a shrewd merchant * while you have time: "But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal" (Matt. vi. 20).

What are you doing? Behold the years go by, death draws near, and still you are making no efforts to redeem lost time.

In a single day, a single hour, a single moment, a fervent servant of God can amass great merit.

Every good desire, every good thought or work, will be munificently rewarded in the kingdom of heavenly riches.

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* The kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. (Matt. xiii. 45.)

Every act of self-denial, every mortification of our inordinate inclinations, however small, will raise us a degree higher in the blessed contemplation of God.

Our present affliction lasts but a moment. Though light, it effects for us a superabundance of glory far outweighing the evil.

2. Why is it then, that we do not secure a high degree of eternal glory ?

Why are we, in contrast with God, so parsimonious, so narrow-minded ?

Why do we weigh so nicely what we are strictly obliged to do ? Why do we omit, yea, almost avoid as hurtful, everything that does not appear to us strictly obligatory ?

3. Truly, our passions blind us so that we not only let our great profits slip by, but we do not even once take our vital good earnestly to heart.

Ah, the children of this world are wiser in their generation, incomparably wiser, than we !

They toil to win a trifle, they deprive themselves of pleasure for a vain honor,

they make great sacrifices with apparent ease, and were they still greater, they are ready to make them in order to attain a more influential post, to enjoy of this fleeting life a longer span. And yet, in all this, they have no certainty of their hopes being realized.

On the contrary, a priceless kingdom beckons us to true and everlasting glory, "a crown of justice" (2 Tim. iv. 8), and indescribable blessedness—but we refuse to do or to suffer similar or even lighter privations.

And if we have ever done or suffered anything for God and our own soul, were it only a trifle and quite insufficient to atone for our sins, we fancy ourselves secure and rich enough; we abandon ourselves to lamentable indolence.

4. How is it that we are still so blind? Have you ever seen a merchant who as soon as he had acquired some gains, would close business, saying: "I have enough!"

How blind, too, should he not be who, thinking he had acquired a sufficiently high degree of heavenly bliss, would for that

reason, neglect to add to his treasure in heaven.

Let us humble ourselves before God. Let us be ashamed of our carnal-mindedness, of our indifference.

We consider no labor excessive or beyond our strength when there is question of temporal gain; but for the acquisition of the highest good, every trifling and insignificant exertion seems unendurable.

For a miserable gain, the children of this world often endanger their lives; for eternal happiness, they will do nothing that appears the least troublesome.

For a trifle obtained with difficulty, innumerable hordes of hirelings have boldly faced the enemy and carried off wounds;—but for the prize of eternal glory, we offer but weak resistance to the devil or the allurements of the flesh.

5. O that our eyes were open! O that we were prudent and clear-sighted!

Were it possible that pain could mingle with the joys of heaven, the saints themselves would honestly deplore not having

employed their time more usefully, not having served God more fervently, not having merited greater happiness.

One single degree of heavenly glory is of immeasurably greater value than all earthly riches.

A single drop of heavenly bliss contains more sweetness than a whole sea of earthly joys.

Were it permitted the damned to behold even for one moment the greatness of the reward attached to every little good work, their sufferings would no longer be to them a torture, and hell itself would become paradise.

If we regard as trifling this great and heavenly reward, if we lightly pass over the thought of it, then, indeed, are we blind and foolish.

6. We may learn from the children of this world diligence, patience, endurance, and cheerfulness wherewith to gain an imperishable kingdom.

We must be conscientiously considerate to make our life as useful as possible.

Every opportunity of amassing merit we must carefully consider and seek, foresee and grasp.

To this end we must put forth all our powers of soul and body, if we would increase our future reward even one degree.

7. Let no one dare say to me: It is enough, I have merit enough. I shall be satisfied if I attain eternal life with the crowd.

So speak the unreasoning and the imperfect who know not the greatness of heavenly rewards.

Thus speak the ungrateful and the self-satisfied who, because of not being intent on increasing celestial treasures, show that they do not prize them highly, and that their love for God is very weak.

Thus speak the worldly and the carnal-minded who can acquire no taste for spiritual goods, because they are full of inordinate desires. They are unable to taste and see how sweet is the Lord.*

* Taste, and see that the Lord is sweet. (Ps. xxxiii. 9.)

8. Do you mind the counsel of the Lord and follow it: "Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. vi. 19). Mark the injunction of the Lord with which in fear and trembling, we must comply: "Trade till I come" (Luke xix. 13).

Finally, consider these words of Our Lord, and impress them deeply in your memory: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice for they shall be filled."

If you listen with docility to these admonitions, weigh them attentively, and willingly assent to them, behold, the Lord will come on the day determined by Him to give you the kiss of peace and eternal love and to place you over all His goods, saying to you: "Enter into the joy of thy Lord!"

CHAPTER IX.

WE MUST BE THANKFUL TO GOD FOR HIS BENEFITS.

1. RECALL the numerous benefits that you have received, and remember that you should refer all to My glory.

The debt you owe Me is not insignificant, nor can you liquidate it without great industry and perseverance.

Does it seem to you a trifling matter that I have created you out of nothing and, when you were lost, came down from heaven to redeem you?

"I have loved thee with an eternal love," —you who have so often despised My love and miserably disfigured My image.

You have not, however, overcome My love and patience.

I have said: "Behold, I stand at the gate,

and knock: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is full of the dew, and my locks of the drops of the nights" (Apoc. iii. 20; Cant. v. 2).

2. All that you have, you have from Me. You have My generosity to thank for it.

All that you do, you do through Me, for "without Me, you can do nothing."

All that you hope for you can receive only through Me. I am, indeed, "the Lord of hosts, . . . the King of glory" (Ps. xxiii. 10).

Look around upon heaven and earth and all creation. I am present in all and acting for your best interest, that you may serve Me joyfully.

Consider yourself. I have created you after My own image, called you into My Church, strengthened you with the words of life, rescued you from the danger of eternal damnation, chosen you to serve in My holy sanctuary, nurtured you with My flesh, purified you with My blood, and destined you for inexpressible glory in the company of the holy angels.

3. Ah, "forget not the kindness of thy

surety: for He hath given His life for thee" (Ecclus. xxix. 20).

Much have I done and suffered for you, but what I expect from you in return is not much: "My son, give Me thy heart," and that is enough for Me (Prov. xxiii. 26).

Humbly acknowledge that all you have, without exception, and without merit on your part, has been received from Me, and that until now you have been a useless servant. This will be enough for Me.

Let Me freely act in you for your good, and it is enough for Me.

Make a good use of My gifts, and it is enough for Me.

It is My will in your regard that, in return for your grateful acknowledgment for benefits received, I should overwhelm you with new favors.

Why, then, raise obstacles in the way of My good intentions? Why, by indifference, constrain Me to withdraw?

Why not consider the poverty of your soul, and prepare for My treasures a little storehouse?

4. Lord, I am blushing, I am ashamed, because Thou art more willing to give than I to receive.

Enlarge the heart of Thy servant, enkindle in me the fire of Thy love, make me according to Thy Heart.

I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast deigned to draw me forth from nothing, to despoil Thyself for me, and to suffer on the cross unspeakable torments.

I thank Thee that Thou hast deigned to endow me so bountifully with Thy grace, to enrich me with a thousand blessings, and to love me even at a time when I was Thy enemy.

I thank Thee that Thou hast not abandoned me on account of my ingratitude and thrust me into hell; instead, Thou hast repeatedly given me the grace of wholesome repentance; chastised and spurred me on: "Be zealous for the better gifts" (1 Cor. xii. 31).

5. "What shall I render to the Lord, for all that He hath rendered to me?" (Ps. cxv. 12.) Behold I have nothing, for all that I

have and all that I am, belongs to Thee and proceeds from Thee.

Right willingly would I, O Lord, give myself over to Thee as Thy servant. I desire to give myself into Thy hands unreservedly, in order to run the way of Thy commandments according to Thy holy will and pleasure.

Is it wonderful that I should serve Thee without reservation, Thou, the Lord of all?

Should it seem hard to me to renounce human and sensual consolation, and to grow weary working until death in Thy service, since Thou hast deigned to shed the last drop of Thy blood for me?

Should it be hard for me to mortify my inclinations and, for Thy sake, to hate my own soul, since Thou hast delivered it out of the lowest hell, and preserved it from eternal flames? (Ps. lxxxv. 13.)

6. This is my will, this my resolution. Help me with Thy grace, O Lord, that I may rightly know the inappreciable worth of Thy benefits.

Show me how great that is which Thou

hast given me, and how much greater still is that which Thou wilt give me.

Impress all this deeply on my heart, that the remembrance of benefits received and the hope of future ones may unceasingly strengthen me in Thy holy service, and incite and encourage me to constant labor.

CHAPTER X.

PERSECUTION AND SLANDER MUST GIVE AN IMPULSE TO OUR FERVOR IN STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION.

1. MAKE haste, O Lord, to help us! Delay not, "for the waters [of tribulation] are come in even unto my soul" (Ps. lxviii. 2). Console Thy servant, and chase far away all that distresses him.

Lord, forget not our sorrow. For Thy sake we suffer; "for Thy sake we are put to death all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. viii. 36). Speak to us, O Lord, for we have put our confidence in Thee.

2. They have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; for "the disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord" (Matt. x. 24). Have I not foretold it you? How were it possible that they

who lie bound in wickedness and the service of Satan, should not persecute the friends of God and the enemies of Satan ?

Were you of the world, naturally, the world would love you; but you are not of the world, therefore the world hates you. "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (Matt. v. 12).

No more complaints. If you could foresee the future, you would thank Me; for it is a great favor to suffer for My sake, and to be proved.

3. Whoever shall suffer persecution and tribulation for My name, shall glory in it; for "whosoever suffers with Me shall also reign with Me."

Whom I love, I seek. I chastise him in this world that he may not become reprobate with the world, but be proof against it and, through fire and water, enter with Me into rest.

Tribulation and persecution are very salutary for My servants, not merely to facilitate their progress, but also to advance them more quickly to higher perfection.

They who are persecuted by the world, who find no consolation in men, are wont with great ardor, submission, and unbounded confidence, to take refuge in Me.

4. They also who circumspectly avoid everything in their deportment that could shock the neighbor, are careful to improve and remove difficulties.

They that are intimately united in love to one another pray more devoutly, live more peaceably, and exercise themselves more actively in the use of spiritual weapons.

They fast, humble themselves, divest themselves of earthly desires, meditate devoutly, refrain from idle conversation, prefer to speak of useful and spiritual things, and thus become fitted to assist the dear neighbor.

Hence, I permit that My dearest servants are disturbed, hated, and cried down as the outcasts of humanity.

5. Am I to have pleasure in you? Then, do not impatiently demand to be freed from tribulation, because it is good for you to be purified in time. Rather confide all to Me,

and pray only that, in tribulation, you may prove yourself courageous.

Pray for them that persecute and oppress you, also for your brethren that they, too, may attain salvation. Do as much good as you can, for thus I acted.

If at any time you are justly blamed, labor earnestly to improve; if unjustly censured, endure it willingly for My name's sake.

Guard against going backward in My service, also from faint-heartedness.

Weary not in life's work. Take not your wrongs to heart, do not concern yourself about what people say or report, let not their threats frighten you, work faithfully to advance My glory.

Say to yourself: Behold, the Lord alone is my hope and my refuge. He is my God, in Him I shall confide: "If armies in camp should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear. If a battle should rise up against me, in this will I be confident" (Ps. xxvi. 3).

What thanks I owe to the Lord that He

has deigned to rank me a knight of the cross !

That I may merit to drink of the chalice of my Lord and to resist unto blood (Matt. xx. 22).

6. God will make him who is so determined, a spectacle to angels and men that, whatever may come upon him, he shall not be moved.

He who, on the contrary, courts the vain favor of men, who must be dealt with delicately, will in tribulation, easily become despondent and dejected.

He who so acts, will turn to his shame and confusion that which to stronger and more zealous souls, would have been a means of high honor and great reward.

Be watchful, be wary, and go carefully forward, keeping yourself quite pure, and, in God's eyes, all will be pleasing.

As for the rest, be of good courage ! " Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing: and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not there-

fore: better are you than many sparrows" (Matt. x. 29–31).

Earthly joy and sorrow lie behind you. To the conquerors will be given in a blessed eternity the crown of victory.

He that has endured the hardest trials for My sake, shall enjoy the greatest glory.

For this is the will of My Father and My will. The more like to Me in suffering any one becomes, the more like to Me in victory also shall he be.

CHAPTER XI.

ONLY BY STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION CAN WE MITIGATE THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS LIFE.

1. Ponder these words: Earthly things can afford you no consolation in the wretchedness and sufferings of this poor, changeable, pitiful life.

You may run after all things, seek all things, but rest you will not find. On the contrary, when all remedies have proved ineffectual, you will find only suffering so much the more bitter.

Behold the children of the world. They are unhappy even when they most ardently pursue happiness.

Everywhere they are greedy for comfort, but never happy or satisfied. The consolations of this world are vain; but men do

not see their hollowness, because they have not considered them in their heart.

2. Do you keep aloof from them. Seek to please God. Be in earnest about your perfection. This will soothe suffering far more than all the delights and treasures of the world.

If you reach the perfection of your state, then nothing in the world can rob you of peace: not poverty, not contempt on the part of men, not sickness, not blows, not imprisonment, not temptation, not even the approach of death.

From all this a perfect soul fears nothing; indeed, she hardly regards it as evil, but rather as a good, because Christ has by His example prepared us for it. What Christ Himself lovingly embraced and taught us lovingly to embrace, must necessarily be something good.

The nearer you approach perfection, the less you will fear all this. Yes: by degrees you will with the Apostle long for and gladly glory in it.

3. What can trouble or perplex you,

when even this so-called evil has become to you a source of joy and exultation ?

A fervent religious, zealous for perfection, is even in this life truly happy.

The sweetness found in striving for virtue is, in fact, something inexpressibly great. It not only extracts the bitterness from passing ills, but even sweetens them.

If you were ever fervent, you know from experience how true this is, and that words fail to express the extent of this happiness.

4. Consider how many good religious rejoice in tribulation. They congratulate themselves because of persecution; in sickness they are peaceful, and they joyfully praise God.

How hearty such thanks ! How deep such peace ! How pure such joy !

Such qualities are, thanks to the goodness and grace of God, the effects and reward of striving for virtue in those who love perfection.

May, therefore, this so great and so wonderful impulse spur you on to strive for virtue !

Whatever adversity may happen to you, thanks to the love of perfection, it will become less sensible.

A good, pure conscience is, indeed, always peaceful, joyful, and happy.

5. Reverse the picture. Have you at any time given yourself up to tepidity? Then remember how hard and tedious everything was to you at that season.

You were not only incapable of overcoming contradictions, but you created numerous difficulties for yourself, and assumed many crosses and burdens.

No man in the world is so much to be pitied as a tepid religious, for he has neither the joys of earth nor those of heaven. He is, consequently, often sad and despondent.

On the other hand, he has a weight to bear from which worldlings are free; and because he feels too weak to support it, sighs and lamentations are heard.

What makes the matter worse is, that he himself, and no one else, is answerable for his unhappiness; he sees clearly that he is guilty of his woe and misery.

6. What a great good is not earnest striving for perfection, even were its full reward reserved for eternity! But it is not entirely deferred till then.

It gives even here below consolation in tribulation, sweetness in bitterness, riches in indigence.

It is a source of joy and happiness, a pure, rich, inexhaustible source.

It is, so to say, a high, airy region, free from clouds, storms, winds, and disturbance of all kinds, over which an eternal serenity, the peace of heaven, smiles.

In it we experience the truth of this word of the Lord: "Take up My yoke upon you . . . For My yoke is sweet and My burden light." (Matt. xi. 29, 30.)

CHAPTER XII.

WE MUST PREPARE OURSELVES FOR A GOOD DEATH BY STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION.

1. Cast a glance over all creation, and consider the instability of all things.

What was yesterday, is to-day no more; or it is, at least, changed. Everything passes and your life with it.

"We have here no lasting abode, but we seek one to come," the heavenly Jerusalem, wherein all that is good is perfect, imperishable, and unchangeable.

Why, then, do you run after earthly pleasures and consolations? Either they will desert you during life, or you must leave them at death.

Seek rather to attain great holiness as soon as possible, and secure eternal consolations.

Behold, death is coming. It will not

long delay, nor will it wait for you. If you have, by striving for perfection, carefully prepared for the journey into eternity, then shall inexorable death have no terrors for you.

2. O how great consolation shall not the servants of God find at death who so lived as to be always ready to die !

What confidence does it not give them to look back over their past life, and the evidence of their pure conscience !

They who in life conscientiously followed the divine inspirations and ever sought to please God, know at death that they are in friendship with Him, and have nothing to dread.

Precisely as one preparing for a journey, has provided everything useful and necessary, the good hasten into the rest of which they have been so long deprived.

Who would not exult over the speedy ending of wretchedness, the beginning of perfect happiness, and the assurance of never again being in danger of sinning ?

3. But if, during your whole life, you

have neglected carefully to prepare for death, then you will scarcely discover how desirable and blessed it is to be permitted to leave this world.

If your heart now seeks rest in this or that creature, it will find it only the more difficult to free itself at death and turn to its God.

If you have neither repented nor done penance for your sins, tremble at the approach of death, tremble at God's just judgments.

If now you give yourself little concern about your perfection your conscience will at that last hour reproach you, your accounts alarm you, and the certainty of punishment fill you with dread.

Why, then, do you neglect to amend? why do you defer the amendment from day to day?

Supposing yourself now very near death, and that you could look back upon oft-repeated exercises of penances, such as scourgings, the wearing of penitential instruments, prayers, and fasts: all this you

certainly would not regret. But you will one day deeply bewail not having overcome your perverse inclinations.

It would not harm you to be humble, patient, kind, industrious, obedient, and fervent in prayer. But it will greatly injure you to have regarded all such things as trifles, and to have scarcely thought of conforming your life to religious discipline.

Do now what you will wish to have done, so that later you may not complain of the fewness of your merits and the great number of your sins. That would, indeed, be useless.

4. This life is the time to make satisfaction and to gain merit. On the bed of death, do you know whether or not you will be conscious ?

And even if you are, how will you repair in those few days the loss of many tepid years in which you have amassed only stubble * for purgatory ?

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* Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. (1 Cor. iii. 12.)

Should death surprise you at a time you least expect, you will in eternity have to pay to God the last farthing of your indebtedness. This you might have much more easily done in life.

But granting that you have still a long life before you, you will certainly not rejoice at having put off its amendment till death, and you will experience bitter sorrow for lost time which you could have so well utilized.

5. "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh, shall find watching" (Luke xii. 37).

Blessed his life even when he has much to suffer from men. He who is ready whenever God may call him tastes true joy.

Blessed his death even should the devil tempt most violently, knowing that there is now very little time. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

Blessed his eternity; God will give him to drink of the stream of His own happiness, and satiate him with the inexpressible sweetness of the heavenly manna.

The saints have often congratulated themselves at the prospect of death. Instead of fearing death, they regarded it as a great boon.

They, on the contrary, who do not strive to become saints have a sad life. They have loaded themselves with debts, and at death's approach they feel anxious and troubled. Alas! they have good reason to tremble before God's secret judgment.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE SHOULD FREQUENTLY COMPARE THE ETERNITY OF THE REWARD WITH THE MISERIES OF THIS SHORT LIFE.

1. HUMAN weakness brings this fatal consequence with it, that men would rather rest than push on courageously at what remains to be accomplished.

Men like to render a good testimony of themselves. Have they done something praiseworthy? It is constantly before their eyes. They delight in it, and regard it as something great, however trifling it may be in reality.

Have they, on the contrary, done any evil, or are they lacking in something good? They at once turn away their eyes, that the sight may not pain them.

Truly foolish and blind are they who

think themselves already rich enough, and who believe that they have sufficiently prepared for eternity.

Are they holier than the blessed Apostle Paul? He was, according to his own testimony, well aware that he had labored more than his fellow-apostles; but he did not on that account think he could grant himself rest.

Hear what he says: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing *I do:* forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Jesus Christ." (Phil. iii. 13, 14.)

2. Do you also think of the eternal reward. Think what you will do to deserve it, and forget the good that you believe you have done hitherto.

Compare your good works with the glory to come, and they will appear to you as a thing vanished, as nothing.

Know, too, that many actions, which you regarded as good, were probably sinful and,

instead of reward, will bring you punishment.

"Man knows not whether he is worthy of love or hatred." No matter how much you may have done, absolute security you have not.

3. O that you thought more frequently of a blissful eternity! This thought would be an incentive to subject ourselves to labors and fatigue, to relinquish comforts and conveniences, and to prize virtue alone as precious.

It is only at the cost of virtue that that inestimable joy can be purchased, that indescribable good obtained: "That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor. ii. 9).

You will see then that you have done little or no good, and sincerely will you regret that, in consequence of your indifference, you have lost many degrees of heavenly glory.

Then the weariness of self-conquest, past or future, will not seem much to you, but rather sweet and light, since you know that

every victory gained over self secures to you "an eternal and exceeding great glory."

4. Why are you so sluggish in the combat with sensual nature? why do you complain when thrust aside? why murmur when an occasion of suffering presents itself?

Heathens, unbelievers, and others who have no hope of eternal life, may yield to sadness, but how can a servant of God, with sound reason, be sad in his efforts to obtain the promised reward, namely, the kingdom of heaven?

But, alas! while the children of the world revel in their scandalous enjoyments, instead of trembling before God's anger, imperfect religious are often distressed at what should inundate them with sweetest joy.

Has not Christ Our Lord taught us to rejoice over the ills of this life, to exult, and be glad since our reward in heaven shall be great?

But if you rarely think of this reward, it is not to be wondered at that you seek rest before the time, shirk whatever is disagree-

able, love earthly things, hate humiliations, and, in general, neglect to strive after perfection.

5. A religious often meets difficulties which nature alone cannot overcome.

From a purely human point we can find no motive sufficiently strong to induce us to overcome our nature; for we cannot find it in the moral goodness of the action, nor in the praise or censure of men, nor in the prospect of any temporal gain. In a word, natural motives are not strong enough to induce us to mortify ourselves.

If you merely regard this, you will either do nothing good, or you will do it superficially. If you begin, you will not persevere. Even should you bring it to a conclusion, you have no peace of heart. And what is still more lamentable, all your labor is lost when you bear the burden of virtue to your own detriment.

If, on the contrary, you are mindful of eternal blessedness, and compare its immensity with the insignificance of the labor, its eternal duration with the shortness of the

time of trial, then, you have under all circumstances a powerful incentive to strive after perfection.

Suffering will not then seem painful or difficult; rather to be free from all suffering, would pain you. It is not fatigue that will weary you, but, on the contrary, indolence and sloth.

6. Say, therefore, to yourself: Now is the time to work, to sow, to merit.

If now I sow generously, I shall then reap abundantly; but if I am now too lazy to sow, then I shall be empty-handed. If I now squander the talents confided to me, shall I receive the interest? If I bury my talent in the ground, I shall be cast out of the brilliantly illuminated nuptial chamber into exterior darkness.

The more I now suffer, the greater shall my future happiness be. If, on the other hand, I refuse to suffer something, God will punish me in consuming fire. "Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Is. xxxiii. 14.)

It is nothing extraordinary for me to

serve the Lord generously, but it is something very wonderful that God has promised me so great a reward for my services.

It does not require much wisdom to strive earnestly for perfection, but it betrays intolerable folly not to aspire to it energetically for its own sake, apart from the great reward in prospect.

7. For that reason, may the thought of perfect happiness be to you a daily incentive!

Be not too fearful of the fatigue that may weigh you down; rather let the expectation of supernatural benefits endow you with strength and vigor.

Do not desire to see the great and beautiful things of this world; overcome such a desire, and you shall so much the more clearly see God's wonderful beauty.

Seek not deep enjoyment from the beauty of this world; rather labor in patience, and you shall enter into rest eternal.

Fear not to be humbled, nay, even trodden under foot; imitate Christ, and He will raise you up to an inconceivable dignity.

Be not ashamed to appear before the world in plain clothes and with other marks of poverty, and you shall forever possess heavenly goods.

"It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it shall rise in glory: it is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body" (1 Cor. xv. 42–44).

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE OF GOD MUST STIMULATE US TO STRIVE FOR PERFECTION.

1. To love is something great, and great is the power of love. He who loves can never be inactive. He either thinks of what he can do to please the beloved, or he does something for the beloved; he talks of him, or he entertains himself confidentially with him.

Love has brought down to you the God of heaven. He was made man in order to be more useful to you. Yes, He not only became man, but He would, for your sake, suffer and die and be your food.

How can you say that you love God when you will not do what you know is most pleasing to Him?

If you truly loved God, you would most

carefully purify your heart from faults and adorn it with virtues that, before His eyes, you might daily be worthy to stand lovingly.

If you loved God, you would avoid distractions, you would exert yourself to perform all your actions with the remembrance of His presence, and so to glorify Him.

You would carefully seek interior solitude, to commune confidingly with God, to become most intimately united with Him.

2. He that loves God, is not cast down when he has some loss to suffer; he does not refuse when there is question of a sacrifice; he does not weary when work is to be done.

True love, sincere and ardent, desires no other reward than simply love alone. It regards all else as nothing.

If when bereft of spiritual consolation, you find heavenly things distasteful, it is a proof that you love your own comfort more than God's will.

If you are over-much concerned about temporal goods, and are lax and tardy in

furthering the glory of God, then you love your own interest more than your God's.

If you are given up to temporal affairs, public opinion, and worldly honors—behold a sign that you have not unreservedly given your heart to God, but have retained it in part for yourself and the world.

The love of God excludes sensual attachments. It will not endure that we give ourselves to them more than God wills, or in as far as they come from Him and lead to Him.

3. The lover finds no relish in anything that does not relate to the beloved, and he would wish, were it possible, to despoil himself of himself, to be dissolved, and to become wholly one with the beloved.

But since this cannot be, he desires to be always with him; he aims at nourishing the same sentiments; he rejoices in willing, saying, doing, and suffering in union with him.

Give God, then, this proof of your love, that He may also love you more. Make your will in all things conformable to the divine will.

Bend your will to that of your superiors. You will then do God's will, and please Him.

Follow the suggestions of divine grace with readiness and generosity, and God will love you.

Imitate the example of Christ in true, interior humility, love, and patience, and God the Father will love you as a brother of His first-born Son Christ, in whom He is well pleased.

Indeed, Christ, the Lord, was precisely on that account always the beloved of His heavenly Father, because He did not His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him.

4. O how cold is our love for God since we scarcely ever earnestly think of our own progress!

If a son refused to follow the advice of his father, and constantly shunned intercourse with him, might we not conclude that he had very little love for him?

A son who truly loves his father cannot be long separated from him; he cannot

bear to be deprived of his company and conversation. If he suspected that his father willed or even wished something, he is at once anxious to accomplish that will, to gratify that wish.

We, on the contrary, do quite the reverse. We know that, by denying ourselves, we give God pleasure; and yet we do so with difficulty, we continue to love ourselves inordinately.

We know that God is well pleased by humble, simple obedience; and yet we often rebel interiorily, we murmur against the will of our superiors.

We know well how pleasing to God are prayer and recollection; and yet we prefer giving ourselves up to vicious distractions, we rarely think of perfecting ourselves.

5. Ah! when shall we, once for all, begin to love God fervently? If our love for Him, however great it may be, never increases, we are useless servants. How shameful to love Him so little!

When shall we say with at least some truth as Christ said: "My food is to do the

will of Him who sent Me," and "That which is pleasing to Him, that I do always"?

Let us renounce all for God's sake and, as we leave all else, we shall leave ourselves.

Let us conform our judgment to Holy Scripture, our desires to obedience. Let us despise the earthly, live absorbed in the spiritual, often raise our mind to God, Our Lord.

Let us strive after perfection. If then we fail, we shall have no regrets. If an occasion for the exercise of virtue presents itself, let us not neglect it. Let no day go by without gaining some victory over self.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ELECT MUST INCITE US TO PERFECTION.

1. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that He might be the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29).

Whoever will enter into the kingdom of heaven must be like unto Christ. If you do not become a brother of Christ by a virtuous, irreproachable life, the heavenly Father will not receive you into His Son's kingdom.

Prove yourself and your behavior. If you endeavor but little to imitate Christ, be not without fear, for "God's judgments are a deep abyss."

Let the learned contend as they will about

the unfathomable mystery of predilection, your motto must be: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?" (Luke xxiv. 26), or "They that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal. v. 24), or "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved" (Matt. x. 22), or "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. viii. 9).

2. This is what we should know, what we should most frequently consider, and not the depth of God's mysteries.

Upon this, above all, shall we render our account; therefore is it so clearly and explicitly explained in Holy Scripture.

Having mastered this practical truth, we may easily dispense with the knowledge of the deep mysteries of God; for He will not ask us what subtle investigations we have made, but how perfectly we have lived.

God does not will that the mystery of predestination should be revealed to man, lest he should misuse such knowledge.

It is, indeed, well for us to have no assur-

ance as to our election, because such ignorance makes us humble and more sincere.

For this reason, says St. Paul: "With fear and trembling work out your salvation" (Phil. ii. 12).

3. From our good works we can with some security conclude what we have to expect in the other life, without for a moment divesting ourselves of fear and trembling.

Would you know the principal signs of predilection, those less unreliable than all others? They are: Fervor in God's service, and earnest striving after the perfection that Christ has marked out for us.

He Himself said: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill."

He, on the contrary, that is negligent in God's service and indifferent about his progress, has good reason to fear; for "woe to him that doth the work of the Lord negligently."

Of that servant whom the Gospel calls "a wicked servant," we read that he was cast into exterior darkness, because he would not

work, and would not give his lord more than he had received wherewith to traffic.

4. Let us prepare for ourselves consolation in life and at death, that we may reasonably hope for the best in what regards our eternity.

Let us imitate Christ, "who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of His glory" (Phil. iii. 21).

Let us learn from God's call to strive for perfection, to correspond lovingly to all it means, that we may merit ever to be His sons, "and if sons then heirs also."

The mere thought of this will produce such consequences that we shall, with the grace of God, scarcely feel the weight of our obligations, and in temptation we shall stand firm.

Nothing is so bitter that the sweetness of so great hope cannot take from it all acerbity, and nothing is so heavy that the prospect of such and so great reward will not make it light.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOR MUST SPUR US ON TO STRIVE AFTER PERFECTION.

1. "My little children," said St. John, "let us not love in word, nor tongue, but in deed, and in truth" (1 John iii. 18).

If you truly love your neighbor and wish to make yourself useful to him, then it is not enough that you practise the word of God, teach your neighbor, encourage or console him.

Granting that you do all this, but at the same time neglect to surrender yourself daily as a fit instrument to advance God's glory, you do not love your neighbor "in deed and in truth."

If a man should use a hammer to cut, or a saw to paint, would he not exert himself to no purpose?

You act thus so long as you neglect your own advancement, and are not qualified to labor successfully at the improvement of others.

Your voice is like "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal," and your love consists of words not works, because you neglect the work of which, before all others, your neighbor has need.

2. There are many laborers in the Lord's vineyard. But, ah! what little fruit the sermons of many of them produce! O that we were more able workmen, even though there were fewer of us!

Daily do we attack sin and vice, and laud virtue, in order to prove the necessity of good works! And yet we might lawfully exclaim: The world grows daily worse!

Whence comes it, then, that we labor without fruit? It comes from this, that our life is not conformed to the dignity of laborers in the Lord's vineyard.

The Word of God is a two-edged sword, but God by His inspiration must instruct us in the art of using it, else we shall not be

able to overcome the powers of hell, and the vices of the children of the world.

But why should God instruct you by His inspiration, since you do not prepare for His teaching by recollection and devotion ?

3. He who often turns to God in prayer and strives to grow in perfection, wins great victories with the sword of the Spirit.

It has happened that a single man, filled with glowing fervor, has brought back to God whole cities and kingdoms, after others had tried in vain; as for instance, Jonas, who without human aid converted the Ninivites.

Think of St. Paul and the other apostles. What rich trophies did they not win by their preaching throughout the world ! True, they were intent on mortifying themselves, although actually filled with the Holy Ghost.

They did not spare themselves, and counted it all joy when they fell into " divers temptations " (James i. 2).

They let their light shine before men, and

because the latter saw their good works, they praised the Father in heaven.

Of persecution they had no fear; on the contrary, they went forth valiantly to meet it, and full of joy at being esteemed worthy to suffer ignominy for the name of Jesus.

4. Examine history, and you will find that often simple men, pious and devout, though living in the world, have brought more blessing on it than learned but indevout religious, puffed up with their own knowledge.

For the world is not converted "by persuasive words of human wisdom," but only by the power of the cross of Christ.

Now, how will he who does not love this cross himself be able to persuade others to imitate the Crucified!

Let us not be deceived: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing" (John vi. 64).

"If the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men" (Matt. v. 13).

This is, perhaps, the reason that many scorn us and say: "They are like clouds without water which are carried about by winds" (Jude i. 12).

While we should be truly spiritual men, they discover in us many grave faults, and that is a serious drawback to our efficiency.

5. If you do not earnestly strive to diminish your faults, and be on the alert to make progress in virtue, your efforts to further the salvation of your neighbor will be to no purpose.

But admitting that God, in His mercy to the poor children of men, may grant some fruit, still the fault will be yours that the harvest is not more abundant.

If you do not take to heart your own sanctification, you will not only not advance God's glory, but the more negligent you become the more probability there is that you will diminish it.

How wholly unworthy such a sentiment in a religious man! how deplorable such laxity! how hateful a mind so base!

Behold, God has Himself deigned to

enroll you among His champions, and furnish you with spiritual weapons—not, indeed, solely for the purpose of gaining the victory over your own faults, but to learn to free others from theirs.

To be a champion of Christ is a great honor, a great happiness; but to neglect His work after He has clothed you in His armor, that were, indeed, a disgraceful, an overwhelming crime!

To capture souls taken in the snares of Satan, is a higher, an incomparably nobler call; and it is, also, an earnest, holy duty to correspond to a call so full of glory.

It is a sublime problem, and the holiest among all holy occupations, to labor in union with God for the salvation of souls. But it requires, one might be tempted to say, *divine* men, such as have cast out the old Adam and put on Christ, the new Man. May God, who is over all, be praised eternally!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF OUR SINS MUST INCITE US TO STRIVE AFTER PERFECTION.

1. HAVE you at any time sinned? Then let the memory of your sins urge you to the resolution of serving God fervently, and striving after a higher degree of perfection.

As the devil was once able to separate you from God by sin, so now let the recollection of sin serve you to put him to shame, and to draw you nearer to the paternal Heart of your Creator.

Consider how foolish it was for you to rebel against God. How ungrateful in you to misuse the gifts to insult the Giver.

Think how sin disfigured your soul, what shame and torments it has merited, and how lovingly God called you back and awaited your return.

2. Whoever carefully weighs these and similar truths, will find in them many reasons for humbling himself.

Seek, also to gain the fruit of self-condemnation from the remembrance of your past life. Far from injuring you, the knowledge of your sins will be a spur to fervor in striving after virtue.

When you recall that you once merited "to dwell in everlasting fire," coarse and worn garments will no longer seem too coarse and too much worn, your poor fare not so mean, your poor cell not so narrow.

Whoever is conscious of having for a long time relished the bondage of Satan's chains, should justly let himself be trodden under foot by all.

He that knows for a certainty that he has been an enemy of God, but is not quite so certain that he is again restored to favor, should, above all, humble himself in speech and deportment.

3. And yet another fruit may be gained from the remembrance of past sins, and that is sincere hatred of self.

It would be very unjust to pamper a body that has once been an instrument of sin.

It must be brought under subjection that is may not offer resistance to God; yes, one must constrain it to serve God that it may no more rebel against Him.

Hear what the Apostle says: "As you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice, unto sanctification" (Rom. vi. 19).

You must give back to God the glory of which He has been robbed by sin, and since your good works taken collectively could never outweigh the injustice, draw this conclusion, that you can never cease your efforts at atonement to God for the insults offered Him and the honor of which you have deprived Him.

Chastise your body, watch over your eyes, keep your tongue bridled, resist concupiscence, mortify the sense of touch, and all other senses and members with which you have sinned.

Keep in check your exterior senses, not

only to render them inoffensive, but also as a punishment for former excesses.

Renounce your own will, not only that it may not overpower you, but also because that whoever has once been so bold as to oppose God's will, has forfeited the right ever again to exercise his own will.

4. O if you considered this, and with true sorrow of heart reflected on it, how soon it would be better with you !

You would quickly discover how patient you must be, how obedient, how pure, chaste, and fervent !

If one may rejoice at the remission of sin, you may with reason say: O happy fault, which procured for me the rich blessing of never forgetting sin remitted !

Yes, the Lord permitted the fall of Peter that the apostle might make fervent progress in deeper humility.

St. Paul, also, and other saints, through the remembrance of their sins, felt strongly urged daily to serve God more perfectly.

Whoever once served sin must endeavor to excite himself to greater fervor, in order

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to atone for the loss sustained; to repair time wasted and, for the rest of his life, to honor God, whose honor he once injured.

5. The more you have sinned, the more reasonable it is that you should busy yourself with good works. Holy Scripture says: "Return as you had deeply revolted, O children of Israel" (Is. xxxi. 6).

You must love God so much the more the longer He has had patience with you in your sins.

Does not His magnanimity show you clearly how much He has loved you, ungrateful though you were?

He could have condemned you at once to eternal torments, but He did not will to do so.

He foresaw that you would, again and again, abuse His goodness, and yet He has spared you. He allowed Himself rather to be outraged than commit you to the eternal fires of hell.

Thank Him, therefore, for His so great forbearance, patience, and indulgence, and

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let the remembrance enkindle in your heart a great love for this mark of favor.

After unrighteousness has abounded, let righteousness superabound. Pray God: "Wash me yet more from my iniquity: and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my iniquity: and my sin is always before me." (Ps. l. 4, 5.)

How much soever you may do to honor God, it is and it always will be little. Be assiduous, also, that others may learn from you to glorify Him; in this way, you will make rich atonement for robbing Him of His honor.

Make, therefore, a firm resolution, and say with the Prophet: "I will teach the unjust Thy ways: and the wicked shall be converted to Thee" (Ps. l. 15).

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GIFT OF DIVINE GRACE RENDERS STRIVING AFTER PERFECTION EASY.

1. Are you still very imperfect? Do not let hope depart. A good earnest will is the only requisite to reach sanctity.

You must not rely upon your natural strength, but upon the power of grace; not upon the weakness of the flesh, but on power from on high.

You need not, indeed, tread the path to sanctity alone; Christ goes with you. He is ready to pilot you to the end, if only you make no opposition to Him.

"I am the vine, you the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit" (John xv. 5).

Assuredly, whoever trusts in himself will fall, and be cast into the deep. He leans on

a broken reed like St. Peter, when he denied his Lord and Master.

But whoever mistrusts and subjects himself to divine grace, though he may have many hard trials to endure, many obstacles and difficulties to overcome, will go on steadily with firm step, and will, at last, reach perfection.

2. To walk in the way of perfection is burdensome to human weakness; hence the Lord warns us: "Strive to enter by the narrow way." But on the other hand, St. Paul assures us: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me."

Christ, Our Lord, has said: "Take up My cross upon you"; but He immediately adds: "For My yoke is sweet and My burden light."

He has also said: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away," and the like. But again hear the Apostle, who says: "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation" (2 Cor. vii. 4).

Question the saints and fervent religious

who have unreservedly given themselves up to God, and you will experience how easy His grace renders all things.

Learn to follow your inspirations from on high, and you will find how sweet it is to observe the law of Christ. It rather bears you than you it.

The law of Christ is, indeed, a law of love and grace. If it appears heavy, it is certainly not so to him who loves Christ and is solicitous to receive the visitations of His grace.

3. Give God, then, entrance into your heart. Prepare it for Him by spiritual reading, devout prayer, and resolutions, that you may not uselessly receive the divine influence.

God will repay ready compliance by a rich share of grace, which will strengthen you in good, and help you to make rapid progress in all virtues.

This is the way the saints have walked. If you follow in their footsteps, you can attain their degree of sanctity; for "the arm of the Lord is not shortened."

Only begin, and you shall see the finger

of God guiding. Deny yourself, and you will taste a hidden manna.

Abandon yourself to divine grace, that it may carry you, and you will without great effort reach the mountain of the Lord, there to receive the blessing promised to those who generously give to God.

As for those that courageously give all to God, their strength "shall be renewed like the eagle's," furnished with which, they shall fly and not weary.

PART II.

OF THE MEANS THAT A RELIGIOUS MAN MUST EMPLOY THE SOONER TO REACH THE PERFECTION OF HIS STATE.

CHAPTER I.

WE MUST EARNESTLY PRAY TO GOD IN OUR STRIVINGS AFTER PERFECTION.

1. "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." (Matt. vii. 7, 8.)

These are the words of our loving Lord, who desires to give much more than we to receive, who rather lets Himself be found than that we should seek Him, and who

hastens to open that we may not knock too long.

Consider in how many varied ways He declares the greatness of His love; observe how readily He multiplies His promises so as to increase your confidence in asking, and to prepare your heart to receive.

2. If you would become perfect, go to Him, and pray that you may receive, seek that you may find, knock that it may be opened unto you.

Or do you fear that He might refuse your petition, conceal Himself from you, or close His ears to your knocking?

No; God is not like men who, by giving, become poor, because they only possess a little, and this little not of themselves, but of what they have received. God, on the contrary, is "rich for all who call upon Him." He has no fear of becoming poor.

Men are like rivulets that may dry up. God is just the reverse. He is higher than heaven, deeper than hell, broader than the ocean. No matter how bountifully He pours

out the treasures of His wisdom and mercy, He loses nothing at all.

3. Behold, God is ready to give, if you are only ready to receive.

O the overflowing liberality of the divine goodness! In our hands He has placed the riches of His grace.

Now, is it not so? "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find." As it is our part to ask, it is also for us to receive whatever we ask.

Nor has He put any limits to the extent of our asking. We may without exception receive all that we desire.

If He is ready to give us all that we ask, how much more His good Spirit to those that ask. "Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James i. 17).

4. No prayer pleases God more than the expression of an ardent desire after perfection; none is more meritorious; none finds quicker response.

The greater and more excellent the gifts are for which we ask God, the more gladly

does He answer us; for in His great goodness, the Lord nourishes the ardent desire of enriching us.

On the other hand, he who either not at all, or rarely, or carelessly asks for such gifts, offers to God no little offence.

The Lord calls to us: "If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink" (John vii. 37); "Come to Me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Matt. xi. 28); and: "Come buy without money," and He often invites us in like manner.

Does not he that thirsts and is naked, and yet is bold enough not to heed so loving an invitation, offer to Our Lord a gross insult?

If any one refuses to ask humbly for the help prepared for him, does he not offend? Is there not reason to say that he despises the gifts of heaven?

5. Ah, our sad blindness! Behold the heavenly treasures open to us, that we may become rich! But we scarcely stretch out our hand to relieve our most pressing wants.

The source of the fountain of living waters, waters flowing unto life eternal, stands open to us, and we scarcely quench our thirst.

We could easily unfold our wings to soar heavenward; and yet we prefer to remain with miserable sinners, wallowing in the mire of this world.

Is it, then, too little that God should bestow abundance on him who asks Him for it?

Or shall we demand that He shower down upon us the richness of His grace, in spite of our resistance or indifference?

6. "Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy;" for very deep is the foundation of our misery (Heb. iv. 16).

Let us pray God for light to know what is pleasing to Him; to infuse strength into the work, together with courage and steadfastness to persevere to the end.

Behold, He Himself wills that we should ask, because He is eager to hear our prayer; therefore He gave His apostles the admoni-

tion: "Watch ye, and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Mark xiv. 38).

Hence He admonishes men: "We ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke xviii. 1).

If one does not pray even when he could so easily do it, God often permits him to fall, that he may see how weak and feeble he is without His gracious and all-strengthening help.

He that is humble, who relies not upon himself, but full of confidence takes his refuge in God, experiences how true is the word of the Lord: "Because thou shalt have hope in the latter end, and thy expectation shall not be taken away" (Prov. xxiii. 18).

Such a one knows that he is secure in the care of the Lord. The heavenly treasures stand open at his will.

CHAPTER II.

WE MAY NOT LIGHTLY NEGLECT LITTLE THINGS.

1. My son, if you would keep what you have, make progress in virtue, and guard against temptation. Neglect no good-work, however trifling, commit no wilful fault, however small.

The devil is crafty, particularly when he approaches religious. He begins with little things, then step by step, he leads on to the more important.

Were he to come near you with temptation to grievous sin, you might be alarmed by its hatefulness, and turn the iniquity of that horrible monster upon himself.

But his aim, at first, is only to entrap you into little faults whose unsightliness is scarcely perceptible; later he hopes to bring you to worse falls.

His experience is one of long standing. He does not dare to hope for victory in important assaults without having first gained it in inconsiderable ones.

2. As a teacher does not train his pupils in difficult branches before they have made some progress in the simpler, so it is not the way of the devil to tempt at once to mortal sin. They who have listened to his suggestions in trifling things, are prepared to fall into his trap.

Those, on the contrary, whom he could not entrap even once in little things, he frequently leaves in peace, seeing no prospect of seducing them to mortal transgressions.

He labors that you may somehow or somewhere neglect little things in the shape of good works, and not concern yourself about venial sin. He endeavors to impress upon you the idea that to little nothings too much importance must not be attached.

3. Do you, however, be mindful not to place reliance on such suggestions. Give no credence to what he says. He is still the father of lies.

Rather think more of My word: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

I have said, and now I say it again to you: "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater: and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust in that which is greater" * (Luke xvi. 10).

Take this word to heart, and fear: What you neglect in the beginning may be slight, but great is the neglect to which you pave the way; for little things are the cradle of great ones.

Drops of rain gently falling sometimes swell streams to such a degree that they sap the foundations of large buildings. Often, too, a single spark dropping perhaps unseen, kindles a conflagration impossible to extinguish.

* The author here cites from Scripture, giving to the text a freer interpretation than it had in the mouth of Our Lord. By "the least" earthly goods are to be understood; "the greater" heavenly goods. The author states as an established fact that such trivial neglects in the practice of virtue have caused many to fall into Satan's snares. We think his assertion should be understood and put forward as his opinion merely.

In like manner, the omission of an exercise of prayer, through culpable forgetfulness, weariness, or useless gossiping; the abstaining from a slight mortification, or any other neglect of little acts of virtue, may become the cause of a religious ultimately falling into Satan's snares.

4. They who have fallen into the greatest sins, have begun with the slightest faults.

No one commits a great theft without having, by frequent petty pilferings, accustomed himself to stealing. Neither does any one ever leave the religious state to which he has bound himself by holy vows, without having for a long time previously neglected some small rules or observances.

Much that supports man from falling is trifling; and yet, if that prop is removed, he falls.

You will be protected from falling by the guarding of eyes, bridling of the tongue, and control of the other senses; cultivate a spiritual, edifying manner of conversing, punctuality in obedience, frequent examination of conscience, flight from distractions, mortifica-

tion of the taste; restrain your liberty, and submit your own judgment.

The exact observance of religious discipline is also greatly promoted by exterior reserve in the deportment of the body, passing many things over in silence, loving seclusion, patience under the effects of holy poverty, bearing reprimands and community labors and, indeed, any precept of the holy rule.

5. All this must be carefully observed if you would persevere in your good project.

Taken singly they are trifles; but united, they give to the will a soaring power and secure it against evil.

They are like soldiers. Together they form a powerful army. Taken singly, they could not oppose the enemy; but united shoulder to shoulder, they gain the victory.

Thus have I lovingly ordered, that you may not complain of too great difficulty, for I always know your weakness.

Were great things required, you might, perhaps, excuse yourself on the plea of weakness or lack of courage; but as it is

only something slight, and very slight, that is asked, no excuse can be tolerated.

Was not Adam inexcusable when he ate the forbidden fruit in paradise, since he could so easily have abstained from it ?

6. Be on your guard never to despise little things. Seek rather to overcome the tempter in all things.

Do all the good you can, even the least will be richly rewarded; but if you neglect anything, you will soon see yourself in danger of falling.

Give up evil habits, that "no part of a good gift may be lost to you." Thus you will secure yourself against the attacks of the tempter; and that the evil one may not bring your salvation into serious danger, force him to confine himself to little skirmishes.

Should you on such occasions fall once, you are not lost. Rise and conquer, and you will overwhelm him with shame and confusion.

CHAPTER III.

TEMPTATIONS ARE OF GREAT VALUE.

1. LORD, come to my assistance; for I am daily assailed by many temptations, I am almost overcome.

I am often in doubt as to whether I have resolutely enough opposed him, and sometimes I feel myself almost vanquished.

How long shall I endure this miserable life, in which though vehemently combating the devil, I oppose him with so great danger that I am overcome and I sin?

Behold, Thou knowest how feeble and weak I am. Raise me. Chase away clouds and temptations, that I may not perish eternally.

2. My son, it is not bad that temptation and uneasiness assail you.

Temptation is tiresome, but it establishes the soul in patience and manly vigor.

Temptation may at times cast you into perplexity, but it also affords you the richest occasions of merit.

Temptation is pressing hard upon you, but it is only to render you more skilful in resisting.

Temptation torments you, but only that you may have something in this life to suffer for your sins, some reward to merit.

Temptations appear to you insupportable, but only that you may learn to humble yourself before Me, and seek your refuge in Me.

Temptations may at times overcome, but only when you depend too much upon your own strength, and relax in virtue.

3. As for the rest, cry to Me in temptation and I "will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13).

Although it may seem to you that I am far from you, I am really nearer than you think.

Am I not within you by My grace every time you valiantly resist a temptation? I dwell in you, school you, protect you, encourage you, and take pleasure in your determination to fight and conquer.

Let the struggle with temptation be ever so hard, I can console you and make it easier for you.

4. What thought can be more welcome and consoling to you than the conviction that you are really one of My little flock?

O let this rouse your hope, let this animate your confidence when the evil one torments you with divers temptations.

He needs not to tempt you when you belong to him; he needs give himself no trouble to turn you from the way of My commandments when he is not certain that you walk with Me.

Temptation would not displease you, if My grace and love did not dwell in your heart.

Take courage, therefore, and know that I came not to bring peace, but the sword.

Oftentimes have I told you, and now

again repeat: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. xvi. 24).

Will you come after Me? Will you enter with Me into glory? Then take up the cross of temptation joyfully, and fight till your life ends in victory.

5. Is the combat hard? Say with the Egyptian Joseph: "How then can I do this wicked thing and sin against my God?" (Gen. xxxix. 9.)

Is the combat long and wearisome? Go to the guide to whom obedience entrusts your soul, ask him for advice, follow it, lay open your interior before him without reserve.

Is the combat hot? Rouse your courage, pray earnestly, work indefatigably, chastise your body, and humble yourself before My face.

It is often advisable not to let yourself be drawn into the contest with temptation, but rather to turn your eyes away from it. It is also in combat against outside enemies that retreat sometimes gains the victory.

Scruples of conscience one must treat with contempt, that they may do no hurt; for then the devil feels ashamed and discouraged. He fears nothing so much as to see himself undervalued and despised.

Should you fall, be not disheartened. Rise promptly. Think not that victory is never to be yours.

Regret your false step, and think that it occurred either because you were slothful in opposing, tardy in flying, elated with self-confidence, unmindful to pray, imprudent in guarding your heart, rash in judging, or negligent in the performance of your labor.

In such cases, you suffer shame, that you may learn to feel compassion for others, to humble yourself, to pray constantly, to work fervently at your perfection, and not to tamper with temptation.

CHAPTER IV.

IN TIME OF DESOLATION, ONE MUST HOLD FAST TO GOOD PURPOSES.

1. THERE are not at all times comfort and spiritual joy. God wills that there should be seasons in which He exercises us more than usual in patience, by desolation and dryness.

In such states, everything is repugnant to us. What once appeared the easiest thing in the world, we now find an insupportable burden.

Do not in such a case, imagine yourself abandoned by God. Be convinced that it is love makes Him act thus with you, that desolation as well as heavenly consolation, may help you to attain perfection.

2. In such a state, beware of giving up your good purposes. To neglect prayer, to

extinguish the fire of meditation, or to abandon the thorny path of mortification at such a time, would all be dangerous.

The evil one tempts you in the time of trial and desolation, and he will try to persuade you that all your efforts are useless.

Make no resolutions in time of desolation. At such moments it is difficult to conceive good or proper ones, because your attention is then directed to vanity, and your heart inclined to sensuality.

3. Rather remember that comfort was once vouchsafed you, that its blessed effects may now keep you firm and upright.

Autumn is followed by winter, when the earth, indeed, becomes barren and produces no fruit. But for all that, man is not deprived of every means of subsistence; he lives rather comfortably, and he will continue to do so from what he has laid by at other seasons.

Do you act in like manner. When consolation is wanting, recall the happy seasons in which the divine visitations filled your heart with unspeakable sweetness; and now

in desolation carry out the resolutions then taken.

If at that time you noted down thoughts or resolves, produce them now; read them again, that the remembrance of your former sentiments may contribute to your present relief. Comfort would be without benefit to you if you did not try to draw this advantage from it for the time of desolation.

4. Remember, too, that God permitted such temptations and embarrassments to come upon you for your own advantage.

If a stranger enter an unknown house, the master of the house will provide him with a light that he may not stumble and fall in the dark. But if one comes who, from frequent visits, is familiar with the run of the apartments, he relies on his knowledge without thought of a lamp.

Thus has God acted towards us at our entrance into the religious state, when we had but a faint idea of the spiritual life. He led us by the hand, enlightened and consoled us in the time of prayer, that our feet might not stumble.

But now when we should be well advanced, well acquainted with the terms and ways of the spiritual life, He allows us at times to wander in darkness, that we may learn to proceed in spite of desolation, and accustom ourselves to exertion.

If we are of good will, the darkness will not be so profound as to bring us into danger. We need but, in a certain sense, to seek the way gropingly, thus to carry into effect what the light previously taught us.

He that conducts himself after this manner in time of desolation, will neither stumble nor fall; he will rather find opportunities for more rapid progress and greater merit.

5. Give to God, then, this proof of your assiduity and good will.

He tries you lovingly as a fond mother her little child. To see whether it has learned to walk, she retires, without however leaving it entirely alone or absenting herself. Indeed, it is her delight to be sought and found, as she shows by taking

her little one up, and tenderly embracing it again and again.

The little one, mindful of its mother's caresses, makes every effort to return to her, and thus it learns to use its little feet. It develops its weak powers by their proper use.

Do you act in like manner. Thank the Lord God that, through pure regard for your own advantage, He withdraws from you for a time His sensible grace.

CHAPTER V.

MONASTIC COMMUNITY LIFE IS A MEANS OF SELF-SANCTIFICATION.

1. Let us thank God that in His exceeding goodness, He has called us to live under obedience with good and well-inclined brethren.

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Ps. cxxxii. 1).

Who can possibly esteem so great a gift as it deserves? Of the call to religion, one can truly say: "Now all good things came to me together with it" (Wis. vii. 11).

For they that live in communion with good brethren feel that, by their edifying example, they are excited and impelled to more fervent striving after perfection.

Companions in religion are no drawback from doing good, but rather an incentive, a

spur, goading on from virtue to virtue, since all pursue but one aim, the perfect practice of solid virtue.

Among so many brethren, you find models of humility, simplicity, and brotherly love. One teaches you ardor in prayer; another, mortification of the exterior senses; a third, enlightened fervor of soul.

From one, you learn spiritual prudence; from another, perfect obedience; from a third, great love of poverty, and so of the other virtues.

In how short a time we would become holy, were we to imitate the virtuous example of others!

2. We should be equally grateful to God for the constant practise of patience, of which community life affords untold opportunities: For "patience hath a perfect work" (James i. 4).

Now, it is this same community life that affords so many occasions and incentives to the practice of this so salutary virtue.

Manifold occasions are offered us for patience and merit by the faults and weak-

nesses of our brethren, the privations of poverty, by the backbiting of evil-minded men, the ordinances of superiors, the difficulties connected with our occupation, and other circumstances.

God, in His great goodness, wills that in all this we be often tried, that we may in a short time learn to renounce self, and be transformed into perfect men.

To him to whom daily opportunities of self-denial are presented, the acquirement of virtue becomes, with God's grace, easy.

3. To this is added the watchfulness of superiors and their paternal care of us, certainly as powerful a means as we could desire.

As a sick person needs the frequent visits of a physician, so it is greatly to be desired that in our human weakness, we should have some one to arouse us from time to time to a sense of duty, that we may not lag on the way.

As they who would venture on a dangerous path, must take with them an experienced guide, so it is good for us to be led by virtuous men.

Do we not, again and again, require their admonitions, encouragement, direction, correction, and other charitable services ?

Would to God we were not so immortified as to cast the advice of our spiritual guides and physicians like dust to the winds !

It should give us great peace, great confidence, and great consolation.

Let us not regard this means as trifling. Let us beware of complaining of anything, because it is contrary to the flesh and to our own evil tendencies.

Let us express our gratitude to God and man, by exhibiting grateful sentiments in all we do, so that whatever the religious life may bring with it may serve to our advantage, and respond to the loving designs of the divine good pleasure.

4. It is customary, moreover, for religious to entertain themselves on spiritual subjects; and it has no small advantage when one deliberates how he can best assist his neighbor, how best promote God's glory, and how make the greatest progress by over-

coming his faults, and by the exercise of virtues.

Besides this, we have times of prayer in common, when with one tongue we invoke the divine mercy, and storm heaven to be propitious to us in spite of our faults. In this we give mutual support, the fervor of one supplying for the coldness of another.

The prayer of each individual is of value to all the others. He that earnestly prays with another, has, even if quite dry, gained not a little by this union of prayer.

5. You see, therefore, how rich in blessings the common life is to religious.

It spares them many cares, protects them from many enemies, fits them out with the most proper weapons, offers them all possible means of advancing, and makes them susceptible of a wonderful outpouring of divine grace.

Woe to him that turns so much good to his perdition, or, in seeking for particularities, withdraws from the exercises of the common life!

Woe to him who, through sloth, tepidity,

a longing for worldly amusements, or in consequence of lax principles, deceives himself, and by his complaints and shocking manner of life becomes a scandal to his brethren !

It were better he had remained in the world, than as a religious be a stumbling-block in the way of those that might advance.

Let us use all our efforts to respond to so many and so great proofs of divine favor; else, perhaps, because of our remissness, God may repent having called us to His holy house, and others bear away our crown of heavenly joy.

Let us rather cling lovingly to this mode of life. Let us not seek for a means of self-sanctification that does not harmonize with it.

Since God has shown us this easy way to heaven, let us not be negligent. Let us rather with gladness, readiness, and joyfulness of spirit, endure the hardships of community life, that we may also taste in abundant measure its sweet and salutary fruits.

CHAPTER VI.

WE MUST REVEAL THE STATE OF OUR CONSCIENCE.

1. If you desire to enjoy peace of conscience undisturbed, and under all circumstances to preserve spiritual joy, you must never conceal your temptations, weaknesses, and difficulties, though, at the same time, you must not impart them to the first one you may chance to meet. Tell them only to your superior and to the men to whom you shall be especially directed for this purpose.

If there be a thorn in the flesh, it must be drawn out, that the bodily pain may cease. In like manner must the dark thought and evil insinuations of the devil be discovered, that they may cease to torment and disquiet the mind.

Have you not observed that a person in trouble, for any reason whatever, feels

relieved and consoled as soon as he has laid bare the wound in his heart? How much more effective will not the grace of God and the influence of virtue prove!

2. If, on the contrary, you hesitate to make known your trouble, defer doing so from one day to another, you act foolishly. You are your own enemy in that you deprive yourself of so great peace and comfort, of which you stand so much in need.

Were you at once to overcome yourself by disclosing your interior, you would by that act calm your excitement, and live in the greatest peace and security.

As often as we manifest our interior suffering, we find, over and above the spiritual comfort we derive from it, a very efficacious remedy.

When you have committed a fault or allowed yourself to be in some measure caught in Satan's snares, you can with another's help easily free yourself and be restored to your former state.

But he that will be his own guide is in the greatest danger of going astray. Not

the sick man himself, but the physician can correctly judge of the malady. For this reason we call in the physician.

"Woe to him who stands alone," says the Scripture: "for when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up" (Eccles. iv. 10).

However experienced you may be, your adversary is still more practised; therefore, woe to you, if alone you venture into contest with him.

3. No one is sure of doing the right thing if he does not listen to the advice of others. This applies not only in spiritual matters, but in purely human affairs as well.

Inordinate attachment to our own ideas too often dims our vision, so that we know not what is best.

We can admonish others, animate and encourage them to do well what they have to do. We see distinctly, we know how to correct them, but in our own affairs the case is different. We see less clearly, we grow blind, and come to quite a different conclusion.

Now, although you may guide others ever

so skilfully, you must allow yourself to be led by another, that you may not, after having preached to others, become yourself a cast-away.

4. What consolation do not good religious experience who, mistrusting their own judgment, reveal themselves to the guide of their soul as to a father !

How easily they find a remedy for their sufferings, strength in temptation, protection against sin !

Such a manifestation of one's interior is an excellent means to drive away the devil, and frustrate his designs. He needs, and, indeed, loves the darkness, that he may undisturbed transform himself into an angel of light.

The devil would be pleased were we never humbly to acknowledge what we have done, nor lay bare our thoughts to our spiritual guide. He aims that we should rather be directed by our own prudence and discernment, that we may not learn from experienced combatants the art of conquering and putting him to confusion.

If his plans are discovered, he has nothing more to hope for; he at once abandons the contest, for he cannot endure the light.

Nothing so easily discourages and enfeebles him as to have his artifices laid bare.

5. It is not of rare occurrence for the devil to cease at once to tempt one that is in the habit of disclosing his temptations, for he knows full well that he would only be conquered, and his weakness be daily brought to light.

No matter how much evil he may counsel, what perplexity he may bring about, how many difficulties he may create, if his attacks are discovered, he must despair of victory.

How precious a virtue is that humility that lays bare the inmost folds of the heart! Over truly humble souls the devil has no power.

A precious virtue is that simplicity that pours out the heart as water before God's representative! It surpasses all worldly policy.

It is great prudence to mistrust one's self, and to catch all the attacks of the enemy on a strange shield.

Very meritorious are humble manifestations of one's interior, good-will to advance, and pliant docility.

Exceedingly strong is he that has a defender at his side: "A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city" (Prov. xviii. 19).

The grace of God makes the humble and simple strong; and what is foolish according to the judgment of the world, God has selected to confound the strength of Satan.

CHAPTER VII.

UPON THE WAY OF PERFECTION ONE MUST STEP WISELY AND PROCEED SYSTEMATICALLY.

1. My son, a variety of things stands in your way in striving for perfection.

Some darken your understanding; others weaken your will-power; others, again, seduce you to sloth and inaction by working on your exterior senses.

Consider yourself: your tongue, your eyes, your ears, your sensual desires, prepare obstacles for you. Consider, also your unrestrained imagination, your love of convenience, your curiosity to see the vanities of the world, your ignorance of spiritual things, your erroneous and preconceived opinions. Consider further your former sins, in consequence of which you still feel weak, your evil habits that you have not yet

entirely overcome by mortification; finally, your love of the world, your anxiety to please it, and your irregularity in the pursuit of your duties.

2. Yet the number of your enemies need not frighten you, if you do not foolishly attempt to attack them all at once, or by one stroke to destroy, scatter, and conquer them.

O that you rightly understood this golden rule, and faithfully followed it! How easy and secure it would make the way of perfection to you, yes, even short and inviting!

He that would be freed from his faults at one bound, has much to do. He will accomplish hardly anything.

Haste and impetuosity soon fatigue, unfit one for the combat, and result in naught but confusion.

By such a method of warfare, the will-power is weakened; and because amendment is but slightly perceptible, it happens that we cease to grapple with difficulties, lose courage, and give up the contest.

3. Whenever the tempter finds a truly fervent soul, whom he cannot turn from the service of God by any other artifice, he urges her to combat her faults. This she undertakes with systematic, but inconsiderate impetuosity.

Be assured the devil does not fear even when he hears you say: "Now, I will really amend my life in all things, and become holy." Such a resolution only makes him laugh; indeed, he knows full well that he has cunningly deceived many in like resolves.

But he fears whenever he beholds a fervent religious applying every means of amendment to some special, predominant fault, and laboring with all the power of his soul to gain the victory over this one failing.

As such a one is a match for the evil one in the contest undertaken, he can work perseveringly. From his first easily gained victory he can add many others more important.

He that, with impetuous fervor, resolves upon too much, may, indeed, begin with

determination but, owing to the weakness inherent to human nature, it is greatly to be feared that after a time he will give up all.

4. Prove yourself, then. Run over your faults and failings, and determine which you will attack first, which second, etc.

You may begin with those most easily corrected, that later on you may attack the more difficult; or you may direct your efforts first to the principal faults that, putting the axe to the root, you may more readily destroy the others.

Do not say, for example: Henceforth I shall not be vain, irascible, indolent. Such a resolution is too broad, too indefinite.

Rather act thus: Have you, for instance, decided to undertake the struggle against pride? Then let your first aim be to keep silence concerning yourself, not to murmur at humiliations; rather to seek them everywhere, and thus advance step by step.

In this way faults are uprooted with comparative ease, the labor being divided that it may not exhaust the will-power nor hinder perseverance.

The wood-cutter acts in this way. He does not imagine he can bring the tree to the ground by a single stroke; but, by repeated strokes, he cuts through the roots one after the other.

If you labor in this manner at your improvement, you will in a comparatively short time reach perfection.

5. But even if you have to struggle for a long, long time with a single fault, do not be concerned. When the hostile leader has fallen, all other enemies take flight; and if the corner-stone of the edifice has been loosened, all the other parts of it will tumble.

As the virtues, so also the vices stand in connection with one another. It is impossible to overcome one without, at the same time, weakening the others.

If one fault is destroyed the others are shaken, and you will easily uproot them all.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NECESSITY OF MEDITATION.

1. So long as you live upon earth, you are subject to many errors and misconceptions; consequently, you become inconstant in good resolutions, and you often wander from the right path.

Since, then, you are always ailing, you must often and cheerfully take spiritual medicine.

Were you to neglect this precaution, you would not only give up striving for perfection, but even endanger your salvation.

Some of these means cannot be used at pleasure, either as to time or measure, but only with discretion and the advice of an experienced physician; others, on the contrary, may with great advantage be applied daily, and even many times a day.

2. Daily meditation should be a means to flood your understanding with heavenly light, and free your will from inordinate desires.

It is exceedingly good to meditate on the eternal truths and the examples of virtue in Christ and His servants; it is good, yes, and a source of all good.

Meditation frees us from prejudices, gives wholesome lessons, destroys evil desires, and rends asunder the net of the evil one.

Meditation is the mother of solid and sincere devotion, of self-surrender to God; for it gently and efficaciously inclines our will to do all that is pleasing to Him.

Emotional devotion, or remission of one's self to God, that has not been aroused by previous meditation, is, as a rule, valueless and unstable, because it is without a firm foundation in the sphere of one's knowledge, or perceptive faculty.

Such sensible devotion is only passing and superficial. It easily yields to temptation or dryness.

3. Observe people of the world that do not

meditate or try to supply for the want of this means of virtue, by frequently hearing the divine Word and reading edifying books. How few of them live as they should! how many tread the way of perdition! how many never think of God and eternity!

"With desolation is all the land made desolate: because there is none that considereth in the heart" (Jer. xii. 11).

Others, the tenor of whose life is in general blameless and virtuous, frequently stumble and even fall, because they do not think often enough on the eternal truths.

If to-day they are fervent in God's service, to-morrow they will be tepid, and thus their whole life is a continual vacillation between building up and tearing down. Their spiritual edifice is never completed.

4. A spiritual man finds in meditation savory nourishment and salutary refreshment. These are as indispensable to the soul as daily bread and nightly slumber are to the body.

Meditation is like a mirror, into which the soul must daily look, till she has removed

from herself every deformity and acquired every attraction, so that her heavenly Bridegroom may find perfect satisfaction in her.

Meditation is the most noble exercise of self-conquest. It is the light of religious knowledge, the means to rouse good resolutions, the channel of divine grace, and a foretaste of heavenly bliss. We should never tire of so holy an exercise. Despite the efforts of the evil one to make it disgusting to us, and to torment us with distractions, we must still plod steadily on.

5. If with the Prophet, you rise from your couch early in the morning and, putting aside all other cares, attentively consider the Word of the Lord, you will with facility sanctify the whole day.

Then mortification will become easy, seclusion pleasant, silence dear, and communing with God in prayer sweet.

Then you will not find community life difficult. You will go through your labors patiently; and, with glowing fervor, you will seek to further the honor of God.

The hardship of poverty will not then displease you, the weight of humiliations will not press you down, nor the severity of other sufferings, even the storms of persecution, embarrass you.

If you meditate devoutly, you will feel strong enough to endure all this; yea, you will even experience an ardent, a sincere desire for it, that you may become more like unto Christ.

Meditation teaches us how good it is to mortify our desires and practise penance. It presents to the will solid motives, that it may not weary of striving to rise to God.

6. Should you, on the contrary, become slothful in meditation, omit it entirely, or only make it superficially, you may not pass the day just begun in a truly religious spirit.

Recollection would not be to your taste, nor would mortification, nor any other exercise of virtue.

A slight exertion would crush you, the yoke of obedience would prove painful, every hardship would seem unbearable.

You have probably experienced this more

than once. You have certainly never led a more distracted and less religious life than at such times as you were less exact in meditation.

Take counsel, therefore, from your own experience, and learn how necessary meditation is to you. Let nothing that may occur, however new, important, and unexpected, hinder you in this holy exercise.

CHAPTER IX.

OF FREQUENT EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

1. OFTEN recall the presence of God, renounce all other care, and attentively test your own actions.

Your principal solicitude should be to study and know your interior in its most secret folds, and to labor at your improvement, that the Jebusites * may not unnoticed increase and become strong to your disadvantage.

The soul of man is a garden. It must daily be cleared of the weeds of evil desires.

Daily the virtues must be nourished and exercised; daily must we take note of the

* Referring to Josue xv. 63, and Judges i. 21, according to which the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, were not exterminated by the Israelites at the siege of the Promised Land, but with the sons of Benjamin dwelt in Jerusalem till the time of David. (2 Kings v. 6, 7.)

progress we have made, or should have made.

Daily good resolutions must be renewed and confirmed, that the will may not gradually relax, and fervor once sensible grow cold.

All this is necessary to every one that would advance; and since we are not entirely free from faults, there is question of laboring so as to remove day by day the hold the old man has upon us.

2. Thus have the saints acted. And having in a short time suppressed all sinful desires, they raised themselves to the height of striving for perfection.

To what purity of conscience did not the ancient Fathers of the desert attain!

How many thousands of monks did they not happily lead on to perfection!

But to them self-examination became quite easy. That which they had during the night's meditation apprehended to be necessary for them, they secured by frequently re-entering into themselves during the course of the day.

Hence, the custom of examining the conscience daily, or even twice a day, has been introduced into all religious orders and societies by their wise and holy founders.

By means of such self-testing, man learns to know his evil habits and inclinations better, to be sorry for his errors, to form efficacious resolutions of amendment, to impose penance upon himself for his deliberate faults, and earnestly to implore God's help. Thus by degrees, he roots out whatever is bad, and gains much good.

3. But for those that have to labor for the salvation of their neighbor, frequent self-examination is far more necessary.

Many would be truly good religious, if, in their seclusion, they had only to attend to themselves; but since apostolic men must be more firmly grounded in virtue, communication with seculars is not without danger for them.

For him who has not laid a sufficiently firm foundation of virtue, the duties of the active life threaten danger.

An imperfect man easily allows himself to

be distracted by his occupations and so completely taken up by them that, in caring for others, he not infrequently forgets himself.

Now, since we are all imperfect, we must very often, in God's presence, enter into our interior, and exact an account of all our actions.

By so doing, it will be easy to stifle in the germ whatever is faulty, and close every entrance to the tempter.

In this way, we shall devote ourselves with greater precaution and perfection to the care of souls, because we can thus more maturely and minutely weigh all the circumstances connected with them.

4. Whoever desires to make himself more than ordinarily useful to others, must trace out all the avenues to the human heart; follow up the secret path of the evil one; make himself familiar with the intrigues, passions, and weaknesses of human nature, with their remedies, with the manifold workings of divine grace; and exercise himself in the science and art of spiritual weapons.

Now, all this is more easily acquired by one's own experience and reflection than by the study of ascetic writings.

Holy Scripture says: "He that hath not been tried, what manner of things doth he know?" (Ecclus. xxxiv. 11.)

Now, he that but rarely and superficially studies himself, is not at all aware of the opposition between nature and grace in his own interior; he does not discover the crafty lurking-place of his passions, nor does he know the most opportune and efficacious remedies against the ailments of his own soul.

Unlearned but truly spiritual men effect far more good than others that are highly cultivated, but less attentive to their own spiritual life.

5. Of one thing be assured, and that is that in striving for perfection no progress is to be hoped for, no efficacious help to be obtained in laboring for the neighbor, except from the divine assistance. Now, God is accustomed to impart His gifts the more readily as He sees one endeavoring to preserve purity of conscience.

Strive earnestly, therefore, to know and uproot your sins and failings. Reflect how you will set about destroying daily some perverse inclination, how cultivate some virtue more sedulously, or how perfect yourself in various duties.

In this way, you will attain to great purity of conscience, great prudence, great tranquillity and profound peace of soul; a superabundant measure of grace will be accorded you, temptations will diminish, and the whole spiritual edifice of your interior will rise higher and higher on a firm foundation.

By so doing, you will also accustom yourself to familiar intercourse with God, often raising your heart heavenward, to keep your mind immovably directed to Him by means of even the most insignificant actions and to amass rich treasures of merit.

CHAPTER X.

DEVOTION OF THE SAINTS OF GOD AN EXCELLENT MEANS OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

1. "THE children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light" (Luke xvi. 8).

When the children of the world cannot procure for themselves all the earthly possessions they desire, they turn to the rich and powerful, and cunningly seek to profit by their influence.

We, on the contrary, although poor and miserable in spiritual treasures, forget the saints through whose mediation we could obtain many great gifts.

Though the children of the world may often be turned away by the high and mighty, still they return with tears and petitions; while we can scarcely be aroused from our

inertness, albeit we have the most cordial reception to expect.

The former do not weary of long waiting and soliciting, they do all to obtain by importunity even a shred of earthly goods; while we, on the contrary, can only and with difficulty now and then move our tongue in devout prayer to obtain heavenly treasures.

2. O what a shame! Surely God is the foundation and the distributer of all good; but shall we for this reason entirely pass over the saints? or is it of so little profit to invoke their intercession?

You give yourself no trouble to conceal your indifference; yet the saints are the most dearly loved friends of God. When they ask for anything, they are more quickly and more graciously heard than we.

God has often decreed to dispense His gifts to us through the mediation of His saints, thus to honor them and lead us to esteem and reverence them.

Christ called His apostles not servants, but friends; and the Prophet said: "Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly hon-

orable: their principality is exceedingly strengthened" (Ps. cxxxviii. 17).

3. It is, therefore, the will of God for us to obtain many and manifold gifts through His saints in heaven.

Do you regard as trifling the privilege of enjoying the protection of those that once lived in the same danger?

Having suffered much themselves, they can the more readily sympathize with you.

Perhaps you do not value being able to make friends of the friends of Christ, the sharers of His dominions?

Try to be devout in honoring them, and observe how you can best gain their love and favor; you will thus have freer access to God.

On the approach of the feast of one of your favorite saints, purify your heart with greater care, to become more worthy of his protection.

Read their lives, and consider how the saints became saints, that you, too, may walk in the same way.

A very important factor in the veneration

of the saints is the striving, with God's help, to imitate their virtues. For this reason, also, the Church wishes that we should again and again honor and praise them.

4. Choose from the great number of saints one or more for your special protectors and models. Exert yourself to gain their love and special friendship by the imitation of their life.

Let your devotion towards them be, in the first place, the striving seriously to be like them; in the second, beg of them to obtain for you God's merciful assistance.

Ask of one patience, of another humility, of a third the fervor of penance and love.

Attend to yourself and, at the same time, unite fasting and other exercises of mortification to prayer. This gives it greater value and efficacy.

5. Nourish by predilection devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. A mother is more powerful than all friends and servants put together.

The Mother of Our Saviour has also

greater love for us, because she far excels all other saints in the love of God.

The most blessed Virgin as Queen turns confidently to the King; as our dear Lady, she has a watchful eye over us; and as Mother of God and our Mother, she dispenses the treasures of heaven.

Furthermore, it is very meritorious in the eyes of Christ to love His holy Mother sincerely, and highly to esteem her. Christ Himself loved and esteemed her most of all.

The Son of Mary regards and treats as His true brothers and sisters all who honor Mary as their mother.

Let us, therefore, seek to please her, above all, and not be content till we have experienced her mutual love.

It does not suffice to honor her once a month. We should pray to her daily and give her proofs of our love. Children daily and hourly need their mother's help.

All devout servants of Mary obtain through the intercession of our dear Lady, powerful assistance in temptation, comfort in tribulation, strength in labor, protection

in danger, fervor in the spiritual life, confidence in the hour of death, and eternal glory and bliss hereafter.

CHAPTER XI.

OF THE ADVANTAGE OF FREQUENT SPIRITUAL READING.

1. He that would not grow weary in the path of virtue, must daily take some spiritual nourishment to preserve the strength of his soul.

Now, as we are prone to inconstancy, and in the meditation of the supernatural easily distracted by sensual impressions, the attentive reading of devout books and the application of what we have read to ourselves, is of the utmost advantage.

By this means, the annoyance of importunate fancies is more easily warded off, and the soul enjoys in peace and quiet its strengthening food.

Besides, it is easier to follow another's guidance, and take to heart a truth offered us for reflection, than to plod our way through it by our unaided exertions.

2. Your attention will, by this means, be drawn to many ways and motives for striving after virtue that you have neither known nor observed before.

All lights that devout and holy men have extorted from God by long meditation and abundant tears, you can, if you will, make your own with little effort.

New experience will come to the assistance of your inexperience. New fervor will replace your tepidity, new devotion will animate your dryness, new insight will enlighten your perplexities.

Suppose an opportunity occurred of personally conversing with those saints, you certainly would leave everything to avail yourself of it.

Well, behold, you can really, by the reading of their works, converse with them heart to heart, as long and as often as you will.

Yes, the reading of a spiritual book may often afford better results than could be effected by a conversation with its author. What you have once read, you can read again as often as you like. You can reflect

on it with greater attention, until you have made it your own; and you can recall it, should it at any time escape your memory.

3. The life-problem of a true religious is to discover the will and good pleasure of God by all the means at his disposal, and to act according to the knowledge acquired.

Do not, then, neglect the reading of spiritual books; for if you but open the ear of your soul, you will hear in it the voice of God.

It is an astonishing condescension on the part of God that, in His mercy, He deigns to speak to us through writings while we are, perhaps, deaf to the inward voice of grace because of our distractions.

It is certainly easier to hear the voice of God in reading than by one's own reflection. Consequently, the reading of a good book often proves the fruitful source of good thoughts and impulses.

4. It is a necessity of our nature constantly to think of something; but to determine the matter of our thought is far less the busi-

ness of nature than of one's own choice and preparation.

If you leave a wild olive tree to itself, it remains useless wood. But if you engraft it on the twig of a cultivated olive, it will thrive and produce much fruit.

A like phenomenon is seen in the spiritual life. Would you keep evil thoughts at a distance and admit only good ones? Then nourish your soul bountifully with spiritual food, that it may not for the want of it incline to the sensual.

You will, thus, without difficulty preserve recollection throughout the day, and be able to keep yourself attentive to God's presence in all occupations.

Determine on the time in which you will daily perform so salutary an exercise, and punctually adhere to it, unless some serious impediment renders it impossible at the appointed time.

5. After the grace of God, many sinners owe their conversion to the reading of good books. Many good people have, in the same way, reached perfection.

While the reading of bad books necessarily creates much evil, manifold and abundant blessings cannot be wanting to the reading of spiritual ones.

While immodest thoughts and desires, and even immodest words and actions to the scandal and perdition of many are the consequences of immoral books, pious reading, on the contrary, awakens devout thoughts and desires, soon to be followed by devout conversation and good works for the honor of God and the edification of the neighbor.

CHAPTER XII.

OF THE LOVE OF SILENCE.

1. THERE is nothing that so distracts and retards progress in perfection as the habit of talking. This evil custom must be corrected.

"A man with evil tongue shall not prosper on the earth," the Holy Scripture warns us: "In much speech there shall not be wanting sin;" and again: "He who abounds in words injures his own soul."

He who talks much cannot reflect upon what he will say, whether he should say it, or how he should say it.

Constantly abstracted, he cannot be on his guard; he falls into Satan's net, in which he is taken up with all sorts of useless things; and he thinks not at all of the dangers that threaten him.

"As a city that lieth open and is not com-

passed with walls, so is a man that cannot refrain his own spirit in speaking" (Prov. xxv. 28).

2. Do not deceive yourself. So long as you have not learned to bridle your tongue, you cannot make progress.

Hence, the Prophet prays: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door round about my lips" (Ps. cxl. 3).

Reflect upon your past life, and tell me whether you have ever passed a day in relating the sayings and doings of others, and having them retailed to you in turn. How much profit have you drawn from that day?

Perhaps you will find that you have never committed so many faults as on that particular day, when you forgot yourself, and gave full rein to your love of gossip.

Many words have you uttered, but the spirit of recollection evaporated with them.

Entertaining little stories you gave as a treat, and the remembrance of the eternal truths was effaced in the recital.

You had many idle and useless thoughts,

and forgot what would have been most necessary for you.*

Hear St. James: "If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James i. 26).

Know too: "That every idle word that men shall speak they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment" (Matt. xii. 36).

3. O how you would facilitate your own advancement if you curtailed useless conversation!

Could you not advantageously employ in the amendment of your faults the time thus gained?

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* The severe censure which the author here gives to the abuse of the tongue must not be misunderstood. Friendly converse even in things indifferent, innocent jests for the purpose of relaxation and recreation, are in perfect harmony with the most fervent striving for perfection. Their object is God-pleasing and reasonable, therefore they do not fall under "idle words" against which Our Lord warns. (Matt. xii. 36.) Does not Holy Scripture itself say that there is a time for everything? and that there is not only a time to weep, but also to laugh?

You have still much to learn, whether of the science of the saints or of various branches of human knowledge; all of which you could easily acquire if only you were silent!

Then you could also write more for the edification or benefit of your neighbor and practise more charity; in a word, snatch more prey from the evil one.

If, on the contrary, it annoys you to keep silence, to remain in your cell, all this personal gain is lost, besides which, you grieve and injure your brethren.

4. O that you rightly understood what prayer is! It was not without very weighty reasons that the rule of silence was imposed upon religious communities by their holy founders.

It cuts off many occasions of sin, and frees us from the vile habit of inconsiderate talk and hasty remarks, in a word, from gossip!

Silence affords opportunities of listening to others, and of learning from them the art of conversing on spiritual things.

Silence renders the soul susceptible of the

secret inspirations of God, and of communing with Him who said: "Behold I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart" (Osee ii. 14).

Silence shelters us from many anxieties and follies, and produces profound peace in the heart.

5. Be mindful of that wonderful utterance of St. James: "If any man offend not in word: the same is a perfect man" (James iii. 2).

Behold how easy is the way of perfection, which the Scripture here shows to all who will receive it.

It is not to be sought beyond the seas, that you should say: "Which of us can go up to heaven to bring it to us? . . . Nor is it beyond the sea: that thou mayest excuse thyself and say: Which of us can cross the sea, and bring it unto us?" * (Deut. xxx. 12, 13.)

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* The words of Our Lord in Deut. xxx. 12, to which allusion is here made, literally signify the establishment of interior grace, of which the Messias, according

At your side, at your feet, in your interior you have it, as the Lord says: "For lo, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 21).

Learn, therefore, to control your tongue. By so doing, you will soon conquer your other faults and reach perfection.

It is hard to speak without committing faults. Knowing this, resolve to be silent as possible.

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to the prophecy, was to lay the foundation. "It is already among you, it is founded through Me in your midst, without your observing it." But the author has, as is often done, given it another sense.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECLUSION NECESSARY TO A RELIGIOUS.

1. PERFECTION is something interior. It has its seat in the soul. But do not imagine that you need take no concern about your exterior deportment.

At creation, the whole man came from the hand of God, and the whole man must so regulate himself as to serve his Lord and Creator with his exterior as well as his interior.

The whole man shall in heaven reap the reward of his merits; his whole deportment must, therefore, in this life be well ordered.

Suffer nothing in yourself that could offend the eye of any one. Rather so govern every movement, as is befitting one aiming at perfection.

Represent to yourself Christ Our Lord as before you, and learn from Him the exterior

expression of His interior dignity, patience, humility, and reserve, all in short, that is called religious modesty and propriety.

2. "When a strong man armed keepeth his court: those things are in peace which he possesseth" (Luke xi. 21).

Would you preserve peace of heart? Guard its entrance, which is your exterior senses.

Do not fancy the soul can be well ordered and so remain, if the exterior is neglected.

Soul and body, body and soul, alternate in reciprocal action, and form a whole in such wise in their necessities that they respond to each other.

He that knows not how to control his exterior senses, will far less understand how to curb his interior desires.

He that has not strength to turn his eyes away from vain and forbidden objects can with difficulty resist the thought of these objects and be secure against evil desires.

3. Do you really desire to love God? Grant no admittance to creatures. Close your senses to them that they may not force

an entrance. If once they have gained admittance, it will be difficult for you to get rid of them, in order to make room for God.

Yesterday you saw and examined many things. To-day you cannot efface the impression produced, nor prevent the confused play of the imagination.

To this is added yet another disadvantage: the soul evaporates, so to say, through the senses, and loses its strength.

As a precious liquid left uncovered loses its strength and gradually sours, so the soul, unprotected by guard of the senses, allows the spirit of recollection to escape, and in time it will offend God.

As dust and filth adhere to an open vessel, so will the soul become sullied when it is wanting in guard of the senses.

4. To become perfect is not an easy matter. The work requires the whole energy of the will.

Be on the alert then that you may not grow weak. Whoever neglects to control the exterior man, makes much work for himself: he increases the number of his enemies,

he dissipates his strength and he becomes weak.

Build for your soul a strong citadel from which she can, in time of need, combat her adversaries. Close the door of your senses. Do not open them to the enemy, but only cautiously to admit spiritual provisions.

Remember, also, what he does who has to undertake something important. He retires apart, locks his door, and reflects upon the best means to employ.

Do you act in like manner. You have an extremely difficult business to transact. Withdraw, so to say, into yourself, and behind lock and bar deliberate what you will do to amend your ways. Otherwise, you will hardly succeed.

5. He that guards himself securely against transgressions of the senses, may at the same time have much necessary intercourse with creatures without its doing him any harm. He moves among them, a leader of troops with a strong military escort.

He inflicts on the evil one a sensible injury, because of his exemplary modesty; he

gains and stimulates those around him to virtuous conduct.

6. Extremely admirable in the eyes of worldlings, is retirement of manner. Whoever knows how to control his eyes, tongue, gait, the bearing and movements of his body, floats into the life of the worldling as an angel from heaven.

Such a man is heard with pleasure; he convinces and gains with ease. He makes an impression as one from on high, and speaks as one commissioned by God.

Though his tongue were silent, his demeanor preaches; and this often far more eloquently than words, as we read of the seraphic St. Francis.

If, on the other hand, our exterior deportment is immortified and shocking, not only will our words have no effect, but we shall render ourselves ridiculous; we shall draw upon us well-merited censure.

Frivolity does not harmonize with the dignity of our calling, nor a disorderly appearance with the religious garb.

7. On the other hand, beware of being

scrupulously intent on reforming the exterior, forgetful of disorder within.

Your chief aim should be interior purity, simplicity, and order: "with all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it" (Prov. iv. 23).

When the root is withered, the tree dies, and when exterior modesty does not proceed from the interior of the heart, it has no stability.

As exterior disorder engenders disorder in the soul, so the disorder of the soul is expressed in the movements and comportment of the body. Hence, Holy Scripture says: "A man is known by his look, and a wise man, when thou meetest him, is known by his countenance" * (Ecclus. xix. 26).

And in another place it says: "As the faces of them that look therein, shine in the water, so the hearts of men are laid open to the wise" (Prov. xxvii. 19).

* The verse which immediately follows may, also, be very appropriately applied here:

"The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man show what he is" (Ecclus. xix. 27).

As the shadow follows the body, so does the exterior bearing betray the interior movements of the heart. Hence, it follows, that the interior emotions must be controlled that exterior propriety may be observed.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE MUST STRIVE AFTER A PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

1. "Now this is eternal life: That they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3).

Happy he who, from day to day, learns to know Christ more perfectly, and is endeavoring to make progress in His love!

The knowledge of Christ is more precious and enriches the soul more than all other knowledge.

The knowledge of Christ fills the heart with joy and sweetness, and renders the exercise of all virtues easy.

O that we would strive as assiduously to learn to know Christ, as we exert ourselves to acquire human science, and to accumulate profane knowledge!

A golden, comprehensive book is Christ's teaching and life! Whoever knows how to read this book intelligently acquires in a short time the fulness of wisdom.

2. Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He Himself has said: "I am the Door. By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved" (John x. 9).

Through Jesus we are closely united with the Godhead and, in a certain measure, we become part of it; through Him, we have received the adoption of children of God and the inheritance of His kingdom.

Without Christ we are in darkness, knowing nothing and having nothing.

If we seek not to know Him, the favor of the whole world is nothing to us.

Hence, we must carefully examine our inmost heart, that we may think and will what He has thought and willed.

Treasure and love only that which you know Christ has loved and cherished.

3. What Christ thought and desired you can easily glean from His life and teaching.

The law of Christ runs thus: "Blessed

are the poor in spirit; blessed are the meek; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the clean of heart; blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake."

All this has Christ by preference so highly esteemed and loved, that He chose it for His own portion.

Reflect upon the examples of virtue by which He has deigned to give us the model for imitation in Himself, and you will soon come to a more exact knowledge of Christ.

Furthermore, Christ came to cast fire upon the earth, to seek His own and His Father's glory, to put an end to the inordinate love of creatures, to teach the innocence of doves, and the wisdom of serpents, childlike candor and humility, and many other things that the evangelists have written for us.

Ponder this separately, and you will understand in what Christ had His pleasure.

If you are well impressed with the sublimity and holiness of this doctrine, you will find

all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God concealed in Christ, and you may take from them as much honor as you are able to grasp.

4. Whoever loves ardently never loses sight of the object of his love. He listens to all his words; he considers with respectful reserve all he does, and all he leaves undone.

It is most fitting for the Christ-loving soul to abide by all Christ's sayings and doings, that he may learn to know Him better and always love Him more perfectly.

Reflect how long Christ lived in humility and obscurity for your sake, how great love He at all times evinced, how great patience, mercy, goodness, and meekness.

All the goodness He has shown others you should consider as shown to you, too. His gifts are often common property and, perhaps, you have received a greater share than others.

All that He has suffered for all in general, you should regard as suffered for yourself in particular. Say with the Apostle: "He

loved me, and delivered Himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20).

5. O the deep condescension that the only-begotten Son of God took upon Himself! For my sake, He came down from heaven; for my sake, He wept in the crib; for my sake, He hungered and thirsted; for my sake, He suffered the agony of death; for my sake, He was struck with the hand of a vile wretch and with the scourge, mocked and scorned, and for me He endured the death of the cross!

O that we would gladly dwell in meditation on all these proofs of love! O that we were mindful that He has done and suffered all this for us, thereby to teach us what we have to do, if we would be pleasing to Him!

Reflect, also, with what gifts and graces, unmerited on your part, He has enriched you, and how many and how great rewards He has promised.

Thus you will discover the immense greatness of His mercy, and be impelled to gratitude.

Although you have all in Him and through

Him, yet it is for spiritual goods that you are especially indebted to Christ. In future, thank Him for them.

To Him you owe the remission of your sins, and the imparting of the Holy Spirit. To Him you are indebted for all His graces and merits, for the supernatural life of the soul in time, and for never-ending glory in eternity.

If you pray for anything, you will obtain it only in the name of Jesus Christ: "For there in no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12).

Should dangers and afflictions come upon you, through Him only can you overcome them, as until now you have conquered such things only through Him.

In this life, therefore, you should have only one care at heart, namely, to know how to draw nearer day by day to the Heart of Jesus.

6. Jesus Christ loves you with unspeakable love and, were it necessary for Him to die for you again, He would gladly face

death again and again to redeem you from eternal death.

Neglect not, through these or similar reflections, to acquire a more perfect knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then shall you experience with what gentle violence such knowledge will draw you to the imitation of His virtues.

Consider every day some one mystery of His life, some one point of His doctrine. Then will your judgment be infallibly formed according to His infallible judgment.

Ponder with what loving resignation to the will of His Father He overflowed, even to the death of the cross; with what willingness and joy He despoiled Himself of all, that He might make you great in His kingdom.

Think what a steep and thorny path He trod to rescue you, a poor, forlorn sheep, from the jaws of wolves. Think in what a loving manner He brought you back to His sheepfold.

Be astonished at the abundance of His goodness in all these things, and think what

you justly owe Him for benefits so great, and what gifts you can offer Him in return.

Truly, whoever neglects to nourish and maintain with such sentiments and means the fire of the love of Christ in his heart, does not merit to be loved by Him.

7. Unworthy of the love of Christ is every one who does not concern himself to study Christ fundamentally. He Himself said: "I am the Good Shepherd: and I know Mine and Mine know Me" (John x. 14).

He cannot be a good soldier of Christ who is not intent on knowing the person of his General, and who does not study how to please Him.

Follow, also, the instruction of the Apostle: "Put on the armor of God."

To know Christ alone thoroughly, and to love Him from the heart, is an inestimable good.

To renounce all else in order to rest in His holy wounds, is priceless gain.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE MUST GLADLY SUBMIT TO ADMONITIONS.

1. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8).

"In many things we all offend."

Therefore St. Jerome has said: "No one is born wholly exempt from faults. The best is he who has the fewest."

Since we, too, are burdened with many faults and failings, our best efforts must be directed to eradicate them, not despising the remedies.

You should implore your brother to render you this important service, namely, that if he observe anything faulty in you, he will draw your attention to it.

The oftener he reproves you for a fault, so

much the more affectionate you should be towards him.

Yet it is much more to be desired that your superiors should admonish you, because superiors are not only your friends, but also your fathers. They have the duty of caring for your perfection.

2. "He that hateth reproof is foolish" (Prov. xii. 1). He is a proud, perverse man, and, like objectionable earth, "very near unto a curse" (Heb. vi. 8). For he that hates correction, loves sin.

If you bewail in good earnest the fact of your still being so imperfect, then do not complain of correction on the part of your superiors and equals; yes, even allow yourself to be admonished by those beneath you.

When any one blames you, receive the reproof with thanks, and take all possible pains to amend.

It is a hard duty to correct the erring. Not all have the courage to undertake it.

You will, perhaps, meet many who through malice or indiscretion reproach

others without shame or delicacy, but also without good results. Few understand how to do it in the spirit of love.

Be convinced, also, that no one loves you so well as those that are not afraid to combat your faults.

3. "Open rebuke is better than hidden love. Better are the wounds of a friend, than the deceitful kisses of an enemy" (Prov. xxvii. 5, 6).

You reap more advantages from one who corrects and censures you than from all who praise and flatter you.

As much as they harm you who, in your absence, defame and murmur against you, so much do they benefit you who clearly show you your imperfections.

Be the most thankful to him who speaks to you most openly and uprightly.

But if another, especially the superior, is silent on your many faults, if he does not venture to reprove you, go to him and implore him with earnestness not to do you this injustice.

He often lets things pass with an un-

spoken reproof, because he sees you are not in the right disposition to accept one.

Let him know your weakness. Promise him that in future you will value his admonitions highly and profit by them.

If you give him reason to think differently of you, he will look on you as incurably sick and leave you to yourself, according to the words of Scripture: "Rebuke not a scorner lest he hate thee" (Prov. ix. 8).

4. Remember that you are sick. Woe to you, if you constrain the physicians silently to withdraw from you!

Then will you neither apply to yourself a useful remedy, nor suffer others to administer it to you.

Should any one venture to approach you at this time, what outbursts of sensibility, what complaints he must endure in consequence of your impatience!

Ah, how great injury would not your sensitiveness, impatience, and irascibility do you, if they closed their eyes to your shortcomings and surroundings!

How much better would it be if, with

genuine humility, you graciously thanked all who correct you for such loving service.

How much easier would not the duty of brotherly correction become, if they who administer it did not fear to give you occasion "to kick against the goad!"

Learn, also, humbly to listen to a reproof, even if you think it undeserved. In this way, it will become possible to you to recognize your weaknesses and imperfections, and to get rid of them.

PART III.

OF THE EXERCISE OF THOSE VIRTUES IN WHICH THE PERFECTION OF A RELIGIOUS CONSISTS, AND OF THEIR OPPOSITE FAULTS.

CHAPTER I.

OF RELIGIOUS POVERTY.

1. "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, . . . and come, follow Me" (Matt. xix. 21).

This is the counsel the Divine Lord gave to the young man who aspired to leading a perfect life.

This young man went away sad, because he was very rich. He felt he was not strong enough to execute the order of the Lord; hence, his longing for perfection was not sufficiently sincere.

We, also, deceive ourselves if, in a religious community, by a desire to repossess it we at any time or place keep anything

which we should have abandoned on our departure from the world.

2. We have turned our back upon the world, to serve Christ exclusively; and by good works, merit to be received into the future kingdom of glory.

But how can we exclusively serve Christ when our heart seeks its rest in creatures, and Christ is far distant ?

Let that which holds our heart captive be ever so trifling and insignificant, it robs us of an extremely precious treasure, the uninterrupted striving after perfection in a truly religious life.

3. Have you ever yet seen any one that has made strides forward on the narrow way, that has not relinquished everything by turning his heart entirely from creatures ?

He who, even with one foot, is still sticking in the mire of sensuality, cannot possibly raise himself to the heights of the holy mountain.

He who does not look on himself as a stranger upon earth, who does not deny himself all earthly things, that he may the better

with Christ untrammelled hasten forward, cannot draw near to the holy city of God.

4. Created things weigh down the soul and hinder it from following Christ.

Therefore has Christ said: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xix. 24). It is hard to have an over-plus of earthly possessions and not to love earthly enjoyments inordinately.

Hence the warning of the Psalmist is well applied: "When riches abound, set not your heart upon them." We must gladly renounce all things, to testify to God that we value and love Him more than all the possessions and enjoyments of the whole world.

5. We are truly happy, because, with Peter we have freely and honestly left all, and are following Jesus with the cross upon our shoulders.

We need not fear, because Christ has denounced the rich. We have rather to expect reward by being born again if we conscientiously observe holy poverty.

But if we inconsiderately return to the earthly things that we have once left, then, we must, of course, fear for ourselves and await punishment on the part of God.

He that leaves the way of perfection, that he may take back what he formerly despised, shows that God does not suffice for him. He thereby merits a greater chastisement than another that had never experienced how sweet it is, for God's sake, to lead a poor life.

6. The higher they who have left all for the love of God raise themselves above worldlings, the deeper shall they who, after tasting the sweets of God, give up their good resolutions, sink below them.

The more God is honored by the vow of poverty, the more deeply He is injured by its violation even in the least thing.

It is better not to vow and to remain in the world, than to regret vows and give scandal to a community as well as to the world.

CHAPTER II.

OF RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE.

1. LET it not appear difficult to you even if, at times, something is commanded you that is hard and painful to the natural man.

You should, on the contrary, congratulate yourself and exult that you have so good an occasion to enrich yourself with merits.

Were we never to have anything hard or painful ordered us, we should no longer have the merit of denying our own will by obedience.

Such a state amounts even to the loss of one of the chief fruits of the monastic life.

It is very necessary and useful for the superior occasionally to impose something hard, to mortify and purify you, and to show

you how far you are from perfection, so long as you have not learned to subject your will to that of your superior.

Do not murmur against the superior if his orders are not in accordance with your views. Rather rejoice that you are thwarted, tried in everything, that so you may sooner know your imperfections and correct them.

2. It oftentimes happens that what you have to bear is not in itself heavy, although it makes you restless and you feel an interior opposition to it.

The difficulty usually lies, not in the command, but in the bad or defective condition of our own will.

Overcome yourself, root out the perverse inclinations of your heart, and you will experience no further temptation to complain of the orders of your superiors.

3. All that shall be legitimately imposed, you must cheerfully accomplish; for the will of your superior is for you the will of God.

The more difficult the orders seem, and the more distasteful to your natural inclina-

tions, the more desirous you should be to carry them out, and that, too, with the greatest joy of heart.

Should you always receive only light and easy commands, you might fear that you were indeed doing your own will without having the merit of obedience.

On the other hand, if that which is imposed is painful and contrary to nature, and you obey all the same, then are you doing God's will and meriting rich rewards.

4. Yes, Lord, it is good for me to obey my superiors for Thy sake, since Thou, as Lord of the universe, for my sake became man, and obedient even to the death of the cross.

Thou art Our Saviour and Father, and Thou guidest all things with tender yet firm hand.

How can I, then, hesitate to obey? How can I rise up against a command? I certainly know that subjection to superiors places me under the all-merciful protection of God's providence.

What more can I wish than to serve Thee

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as Thou wilt, in humble obedience that can never err?

5. Thanks to Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast let me know and find so easy a way to heaven!

If I obey humbly and perfectly for Thy sake, I need not fear the judgment.

If in the eyes of the world, I cannot do great things for Thee and Thy cause; if I even pass my whole life in obscurity, and for Thy sake bury my talents without furthering Thy glory, I shall not have to account for it.

Obedience is sufficient to justify me. It is, indeed, the exact fulfilling of Thy will and, therefore, the essence of all perfection.

Teach me, then, O Lord, to obey humbly and joyfully for Thy sake, and to prefer Thy will to every other consideration.

All else must be indifferent to me, must be put aside when there is question of complying with Thy clearly defined will.

CHAPTER III.

OF RELIGIOUS PURITY.

1. In all the wide, wide world there is nothing so marvellous, so sublime, as the state of voluntary chastity, as living a whole life long in perfect purity.

This virtue transports us from earth to heaven; and while by nature a little lower than the angels, it makes us equal to them in dignity.

Nay, in a certain sense, it raises us even far above the angels; for to them purity is something inherent, while in us it has the character of a sublime virtue difficult to acquire.

The angels are not subject to attacks of sensuality, and in this they are more perfect than we. In our interior, on the contrary, go on many combats in which the greatest courage and endurance are needed that we be not worsted. In this we are happier than

the angels, because of the manifold occasions of accumulating merit.

Purity helps us the better "to think on what the Lord is."

When the heart has once renounced sensual pleasures, it more readily separates from all other creatures, gives itself up more sincerely to God, and gladly seeks its rest in Him alone.

2. A precious treasure is life-long purity! But forget not, "we carry this treasure in earthly vessels." A great virtue it is, but one exposed to greatest danger; therefore, it requires the most zealous watchfulness.

However, the Apostle says: "But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of the mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members" (Rom. vii. 23).

When an enemy of purity lurks in our own members, then the greatest precaution is requisite that we do not let ourselves be surprised or overcome.

As the earth produces thistles and thorns, and as wood is gnawed by worms, so also,

our mortal body fosters sensual inclinations, which oftentimes infect and corrupt the soul, namely, the soul that is not assiduously on its guard.

3. No matter how far advanced one may be on the path of virtue, he must not presume to fancy himself secure; for if only for one moment you forget to keep a watchful eye over yourself, the enemy, lurking around, at once begins to stir in his hiding-place, and is ready to wound you mortally before you are aware of his presence.

O how many frightful examples one reads in the legends of the saints !—examples calculated to produce a wholesome fear, especially in the tepid and negligent.

O how unfathomable are the judgments of God ! "How is the gold become dim, the finest color is changed !" (Lam. iv. 1.)

Men who stood like pillars, who seemed unshakable, are, after many long years of perfect life, beaten down. In a single moment, they have thrown off restraint and tarnished the lustre that so wonderfully clothed them.

They who eagle-like unfolded their spiritual wings and soared heavenward, who had chosen their abode in the bosom of God, that they might not be soiled by the dust of earth, afterward made a fearful fall and miserably wallowed in the mire and filth of this world.

"They that were brought up in scarlet" (Lam. iv. 5), in the atmosphere of heavenly glory, and had satiated themselves with the heavenly manna which contained all sweetness in itself, walked eagerly in the mire of common, beastly enjoyments.

Truly, "God's judgments are a deep abyss." With fear and trembling we must work out our salvation.

4. Have a watchful eye, also, over yourself. What happened to others more perfect, may also befall you, and that even more swiftly and easily.

The Holy Ghost warns us: "Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12).

Be on your guard, that your body be not a traitor to you. A traitor it is. It eats and drinks, walks and sleeps with you precisely

for the purpose of suddenly surprising you when you have been solicitously careful of it and pampered it most.

Reflect afterward what you have to do, that you may become and remain master of your passions; for the body is either an obedient servant, or it subjects us to the hardest slavery for time and eternity.

Watch over your exterior senses, if you would preserve purity of heart, and be prepared for violent assaults of fantastic pictures of the imagination.

Take with preference bad clothing, indifferent food, for you do not need richer to preserve health; satisfy yourself with short sleep.

"He that nourisheth his servant delicately from his childhood, afterward shall find him stubborn" (Prov. xxix. 21).

Guard yourself from excessive familiarity, and from confidential conversations, especially on new subjects, however spiritual they may appear at the outset. The devil has already caught many in this trap.

Get rid of all vain and superfluous

apprehensions for your own welfare. Be slow to believe you have many or special needs. The more you deprive yourself, the better will you preserve your health and chastity.

Deny yourself occasionally according to the rule of holy prudence of something superfluous, and inflict upon your flesh some suffering. Thus, with the Apostle you will chastise your body and bring it under subjection.

5. It is extremely difficult long to preserve chastity, if one is not energetic in making progress in the other virtues, particularly when he feels interior opposition to obedience, when he does not bridle his tongue, when he trusts in himself, or vainly takes pleasure in his own talents.

God rejects the proud. He often permits those who, through pride have already sinned interiorly, by some exterior sin of the flesh to find their salvation in humiliation.

Long to remain pure without prayer, is quite impossible; for our weak and fragile human nature is inclined to all sensual enjoyments. God alone can give so exalted a

virtue. He usually bestows such gifts only when we pour out to Him in humble and persevering prayer our longing desire for them.

"And as I knew," wrote Solomon, "that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, and this also was a point of wisdom, to know whose gift it was: I went to the Lord, and besought Him, and said with my whole heart" (Wis. viii. 21).

Will you then, also, preserve the pearl of purity, that incomparable treasure, those wings to fly heavenward, that light to know the heavenly? Then pray ardently to God, watch over yourself, fly every secret confidence and keep yourself in humble sentiments.

Personal watchfulness is not enough, without the help of prayer; but neither is prayer sufficient without circumspection and mortification.

Both are at all times requisite, as the Lord says: "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation."

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE RENUNCIATION OF OUR OWN WILL AND JUDGMENT.

1. THE whole life of a genuine religious is a continual renunciation of his own will and judgment.

Had he labored long and much, but only of his own will, it is nothing.

Had he written many spiritual works, complete as to form and substance—it is nothing.

Had he preached so eloquently and so persuasively as to terrify his hearers and turn them from the way of sin—this, too, is nothing.

Had he acquired for himself the glory of literary fame and versatility of talent and scholarship—it is nothing.

Had he been intrusted with the conduct of others and displayed a rare measure of insight, and prudence in the discharge of his duties; had he skilfully managed many business affairs—this, also, is nothing.

Even had he wrought many great miracles —this is nothing. On the Judgment Day many shall come to Christ and say: "Lord, Lord, have we not in Thy name prophesied, and in Thy name cast out devils?" The Judge shall answer them: "Depart from Me, I know you not."

2. If, on the contrary, he has done penance for his sins and wiped out his faults—this is something.

If he is fervent and devout at prayer, circumspect and humble in speech, punctual and self-forgetting in obeying—this is not a trifle.

If he undertakes and bears patiently, or better still, joyfully, all the hardships of religious discipline—that is something.

But if he gives himself up to God wholly and without reserve, and from a vehement longing for perfection, denying himself on

every occasion, and giving up his own will perfectly, then this is much, exceeding much —indeed, it is all.

3. This is, then, the much-talked-of unbloody martyrdom. True, it does not present the frightful picture of blood-thirsty barbarity, though it can inflict far worse suffering on nature than the really bloody martyrdom, because of its long duration, its lasting until death.

This is the wonderful combat in which, with the weapons of justice, we must ward off all the attacks of the evil one, nor lay down our arms till God receives us into His holy city of Sion, and crowns us with the wreath of victory.

That is the strait way and the narrow gate, of which Christ, the Lord, spoke, and through which all must pass who would follow in His footprints.

This is called taking up the cross daily and following Jesus, nay, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle requires us to do.

Many think they have arrived at a perfect

renunciation of their own will and judgment, but they greatly deceive themselves.

Exteriorily, indeed, they obey; but if they would closely scrutinize the workings of their interior, they would find that they hardly ever thoroughly renounce self.

4. It may often happen that our exterior betokens an humble demeanor by our lowered glance, our modesty, though our heart is full of bitterness, opposition, scorn, and defiance. We do not observe all this in ourselves, because we examine ourselves only superficially.

Occasions may sometimes, nay, often occur when a sense of justice and regard for our good name may compel us to betray our interior emotions, while love of perfection should suppress them completely. Thus is the malice of our will often concealed in the heart.

Let us with eyes wide open make a deep study of our interior, and criticise ourselves impartially. Does not something savoring of hypocrisy cling to our exterior deportment ?

Of what use is merely outward goodness,

if the interior is full of pride, blindness, and sensuality ?

Men see only the exterior, but God sees the heart. If you would be pleasing to God, be intent on purity of heart, simplicity, good will, and all interior virtues.

5. If you think you have already advanced a great way, look to it that you be not deceived. You have still before you a long way, and so much the longer as it appears shorter to you.

He whose knowledge is very limited, does not easily comprehend how much he has yet to learn; and, on the contrary, the man that has much learning has no difficulty at all in recognizing how much remains for him to learn.

In like manner do they judge who are still full of passions, and who have not mortified their own will; they think themselves very far advanced in perfection, while men perfect, even saintly, are distressed at seeing themselves so imperfect, at seeing how much still remains to be done before they reach perfection.

Do not, then, depend upon your own judgment. Rather renounce yourself with all possible fervor; humble yourself and, as often as you are negligent, relent not in severity against yourself.

Thus must it be, that you appear not to the eye of God as a corpse without soul or life, wearing the religious habit, but without the works of a religious man; with the name, but not the virtues of such, like the fig-tree which required all its life-sap for leaves alone.

Do not flatter yourself; do not believe you are a good religious so long as you have not learned to overcome your own will, and bow to that of others.

CHAPTER V.

OF USEFUL OCCUPATION.

1. My son, what will you answer when I shall call you to appear in judgment before My face?

For many things shall I call you to account. Many burdens have you taken upon your shoulders by entering religion and undertaking My service.

But how will you be able to excuse yourself if you have wasted the time allotted you to work in My vineyard?

Why are you not more fervently intent on sanctifying yourself and saving others?

Why do you spend so many hours unprofitably?

"Have care of thyself and of the doctrine; persevere therein."

2. You have care of yourself when you disregard all that will not further your progress, and when you employ all your time in the exercise of good works, prayer, and pious reading; when you often examine your interior and exterior deportment, to see what you have to get rid of, and for what you have to strive; when you converse with one of your religious brethren, who is himself distinguished by virtue and knowledge of the spiritual life, that he may guide you to all virtues, and you allow yourself to be led by him; when you exactly comply with what the superior has imposed upon you, or the rules of your Order prescribe; when you read the written lives of the saints, or other great servants of God, with application to yourself, and spur yourself on to imitate them; when before a pious picture or in presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament, you pray for the grace of perseverance, the grace to make progress in virtue.

Whoever does this and similar things in a spirit of true humility, and with an upright desire to improve, has care of himself. He

will, in an incomparably short time become a perfect man.

3. Further, I shall teach you how you must have a care of your studies that with advantage to yourself, your neighbor may profit by them.

Take care that you do not thoughtlessly turn against yourself the weapons given you for the salvation of others.

There is great danger, and you have much more reasons than St. Paul to fear: "Lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (1 Cor. ix. 27).

They turn the so-called weapons against themselves who apply certain teachings to others, who do not take home to themselves and who do not reflect upon their own conduct.

Such persons fail to remember that all learning, all human wisdom are worthless without the example of a faultless, an irreproachable life.

Actions speak even more loudly than words.

If people see you do something difficult or painful, they know that it can be done; but what was preached to them only in words, they are not prepared to do.

4. What think you, my son, converts sinners and confirms them in good? Not learning and extensive knowledge, not an oration high-sounding and finished in diction, but My grace, that spirit and that life which proceed from the intimate union of the soul with Me, and its being penetrated with eternal truths. All this is the fruit of prayer and recollection.

You know the old saying: "I have planted, Apollo watered: but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. iii. 6).

This means that if one does not, by prayer and self-denial, most closely adhere to Me in all humility, then are his learning and wisdom vain; they produce neither impression nor effect.

5. Some turn the weapons of wisdom against themselves by pride and self-conceit.

If they study, say, or do anything, the

whole world must know it. Indeed, there are people who study precisely for this purpose. They say and do, that they may be honored and regarded as great men. But this is desecrating to one who has bound himself to seek after perfection.

They are fools and blind! "They have already received their reward." They, indeed, preach themselves. My honor they seek only in the last place.

With the Apostle, they should acknowledge that they know nothing but the Crucified; but, instead of this, they brag and boast of their vain and profane science.

They should be humble and very little in their own eyes, since they preach humility by their words and their religious dress; instead of this, they alienate and pull down by their behavior what, by their words and clothing, they should commend and edify.

Upon such has the judgment already fallen: "He that despiseth Me, and receiveth not My words: hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John xii. 48).

6. There are, also, religious who like to busy themselves with things which for them as religious, are of no value; thus they lose their time, and in addition bring upon themselves many useless distractions.

Why interest yourself in what only gratifies curiosity ? Why cultivate arts that serve more for amusement than real advantage ?

Why trouble yourself about politics and the news of the day, about distant wars, and rumors of war ?

If your occupation with such matters is not sanctified by a special life-task, or if they have not been assigned to you by superiors, let them alone, indulge no desire for them.

They prove a great distraction, they draw the attention away from the spiritual, and bring us into the danger of suffering shipwreck on the rock of pride.

Meditate on the Holy Scripture, and you will find rich matter that will serve you to speak to the conscience of sinners.

Consult theologians and ascetics, and they will teach you to labor with success in the salvation of your neighbor.

Read Ecclesiastical History and the Lives of the Saints, and you will learn what you have to do to render yourself useful to the world.

7. The world of to-day, indeed, complains that religious people are ignoramuses and squanderers of time.

However little foundation this charge may have, you must still combat it, by making yourself more useful to the world, that your faults and indolence may not cast a shadow over the whole Order.

Let us say to you once more: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. v. 16).

By this, the Lord teaches you to appear before men at the proper time, well versed in the science of the saints and in Holy Scripture, that you may prove their complaints and accusations against religious unfounded.

Let them see, also, that the greatest joy of religious is to make themselves the servants of all out of a spirit of sincere humility and love for the salvation of souls.

Therefore, attend to yourself and instruction. Persevere in it without yielding to inactivity or slothfulness.

Thus will you save yourself and your hearers: "He that shall do and teach [the commandments], he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 19).

CHAPTER VI.

HOW ONE SHOULD COMPORT ONE'S SELF IN DRYNESS AND DESOLATION.

1. My son, every consolation is a particular grace of God, seldom given to the negligent, often, but not always, communicated to the fervent.

However, you need not relinquish hope, if you feel dry and desolate at prayer or in meditation; rather humble yourself much more deeply and say with the Prophet: "My heart is withered: because I forgot to eat my bread" (Ps. ci. 5).

Grieve not that you cannot soar to higher contemplation. It is more necessary for you to be exercised in humility and patience.

Think in time of aridity of your faults and sins, which are the cause of your being left

for a while to yourself, and make confidently the following or like affections :

2. Behold, Lord, I cannot pray at all. I stand before Thy face ashamed. Behold, " my soul is before Thee as arid land."

Lord, indeed, I certainly deserve this punishment, and yet much more severe on account of my sins and negligences.

Behold, Thou hast for a short time given me over to myself, though not entirely, and immediately I have become a slothful, useless man, that I may know I can do nothing without Thee. " It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me: that I may learn Thy justifications " (Ps. cxviii. 71).

I am, indeed, unworthy of Thy consolations; but look upon me, I beseech Thee, for I am sick, and weak, and poor, and blind, and naked.

Show me, Lord, Thy mercy, and give me Thy salvation, I mean the daily bread of my soul, and the joy of my heart; for it is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs, yet the whelps eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

3. An humble prayer, like the above, is exceedingly agreeable to Me, and if it is for your good, I shall hear your petition.

Meantime give yourself up to My guidance, for I chastise those whom I love. Persevere in good will, and the peace which surpasseth all understanding shall some day come.

You know the word: "Remember, the Lord thy God proves thee, that He may see whether you love Him or not."

Be firm, humble, and patient: "Let not your heart be troubled" (John xiv. 1). Persevere in the Lord.

CHAPTER VII.

INORDINATE ATTACHMENT TO RELATIVES.

1. My son, I am Father and Mother to you. Since you left your relatives and became a religious, you should have no further intercourse with them.

It displeases Me if you occupy yourself with the thought that it would be good, or well, or even a sacred duty, occasionally to visit your relatives.

No, it is not genuine love of kindred that suggests such visits; it is rather your own weakness, some hidden defect, some want of religious spirit.

You seek consolation from men outside your monastery, because the retirement of the cell and recollection are not to your taste.

You would be free from restraint and self-denial which the strict observance of your rule imposes. Worldly-mindedness makes you long for liberty unrestrained.

2. That the superior, perhaps, yields to your weakness cannot excuse you. If a wiser superior, one more faithful to duty, does not always do the same, yet he does so occasionally that greater evil be prevented.

What determines him to grant such indulgence is not the exercise of his own free judgment, but your pressing entreaty and your own imperfection.

Instead of craving nourishment for your sensual desires, you should rather implore your superior not to allow you to remain outside the convent for a longer period than is absolutely necessary, unless for important reasons.

But it may happen that, if a religious does not gain the point for which he petitions, he murmurs against the superior, accusing him of excessive rigor in the maintenance of religious discipline.

Rather should you thank your superior for inflexibly adhering to his duty, just as a good physician refuses to take any account of the ill-humor of his patient.

3. In the homestead, you will not be con-

strained to follow your spiritual exercises, so wisely regulated by the order of the day in religious houses. Neither is there a superior there to watch, admonish, warn, and reprove you.

What, think you, will people say when they see a religious in his family circle, indulging himself, seeing and hearing everything, freely contributing his quota of jests and jokes? Long ago I said: "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house" (Matt. xiii. 57).

4. When people see you leave your religious home, so readily dispense with its regular exercises of prayer and labor, they naturally think that you cannot be a truly spiritual man. They are rather scandalized at your conduct.

This one relaxation easily brings another and a greater in its train, and so you are the cause of seculars judging disadvantageously of your brethren.

They do not say: "A religious once did this or that"; but they say: "Religious are accustomed to do or say this or that."

Be, therefore, on your guard, my son, and attend to all you do or say; for I shall not spare you if, by your immortified or sensual conduct, you in any way lessen the respect due to My servants, your brethren.

He that touches their good name, touches the apple of My eye.

5. If charity really requires and superiors command or cheerfully permit you to visit your home or relatives, then be on your guard, to do what is proper and suited to your calling, and always bear in mind how far you can go.

In intercourse with your own family, never compromise the spiritual and the religious. Your visits should be as short as possible, that all may see you are engaged in the service of God, that you love your bondage, and that you will not yield to their unreasonable desires.

Nor may you remain alone under the paternal roof, amusing and indulging yourself. This is not suited to your calling; you did not learn this in religion.

The superior should detail one of the

brethren to accompany you as companion; and as soon as you have complied with the requirements of charity and propriety you should return with him to the convent.

6. For the rest, the occurrences that make such visits necessary, are rare. It would be very wrong should one be a party to bringing them about designedly.

There have been saints who could not when travelling be induced to go ever so little out of the way to visit their parents, though they might have promoted their good by word and example.

You, on the contrary, are weak and imperfect, unable to advance. Precisely for this reason, you look about for an occasion to fall in with relatives and spend some time with them. And yet you have far more reason to mistrust yourself than those holy men had.

It is not right for one to follow the lusts of the flesh after having, for My sake, renounced them.

It is running a risk to be seated at a richly served banquet, when by profession one should be crucifying his flesh.

It is not good that they who have vowed poverty should sleep on soft couches.

There is nothing to be gained by toying and jesting with the world and its fleeting pleasures.

It is a very great imprudence to have free intercourse with the opposite sex after one has vowed to serve God in the state of celibacy.

7. He that too frequently visits or seeks his family, will make no progress in the spiritual life. Had he made any, it would soon decrease by such proceeding.

"And a man's enemies, shall be they of his own household" (Matt. x. 36).

Blessed is he that leaves father and mother and all his relatives for My name's sake, that is, if he takes nothing back from his sacrifice. Such a one is to Me, in truth, disciple, son, and brother.

Reversed: "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life, also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 26).

CHAPTER VIII.

HUMBLE FUNCTIONS.

1. THE perfection of a religious does not consist in his accomplishing great things according to human estimation, nor in being reputed a scholar.

It consists rather in doing God's will, that is seeking to the best of his ability to fill the place in which God has placed him by his superiors.

This is the great truth, which Christ never wearied of impressing upon us by His example of full three and thirty years.

The life that He led up to His thirtieth year, was humble. To human eyes, it was aimless and useless.

He lived in retirement, unknown to the world; and those to whom He was known, looked upon Him with disregard and contempt as the carpenter's son.

And yet He might have traversed cities and villages, preaching, teaching in the Temple, and, by the power of His miracles, have converted all sinners.

He could have done all this, but He did not, that you might learn to keep in bounds and mortify the inordinate desire of putting yourself forward and displaying your talents.

2. O profound mystery! Sweet comfort of the humble soul! Grave rebuke of the proud!

Behold Infinite Wisdom, the King of glory, the Lord of heaven and earth, enriched with the fulness of the gifts of nature and grace, come expressly to combat vice, to rectify error, and to order life according to the requirements of the moral law, burying Himself in a carpenter's workshop, enduring patiently the privations and hardships of poverty for full thirty years!

During the whole time that He kept Himself concealed, He did nothing striking, He led the most perfect life, concealing His talents.

The life of Our Lord and Saviour, useless and despicable in the eyes of the world, was glorious and meritorious in the highest degree in the eyes of His heavenly Father.

He lived as His Father wished Him to live; He did what His Father willed Him to do; He remained where His Father willed Him to remain; He was silent as His Father willed Him to be.

Had Christ during that time performed great wonders in the eyes of men, it would have been very imperfect, since He would not be fulfilling the will of His heavenly Father.

3. How, then, can you presume to push forward, although you can, in accordance with the divine will and without endangering yourself, remain secluded with Jesus?

It is wrong for any one to say: "But why has God given me talents, if not for the purpose of trading with them, and thus meriting to hear: 'Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'?" (Matt. xxv. 21).

To argue thus is wrong. Such a one deceives himself, because he regards not the merit of humble obedience.

Were this not so, to what purpose would the heavenly Father have endowed Christ, Our Lord, with the richest talents, and yet will that, for thirty long years, He should make no public use of them ?

4. Let it be said to you, O high-minded, self-sufficient child of man, God has given you gifts of nature and grace to the end that by obedience you may offer them to Him in sacrifice.

The talents that, for God's sake, are buried, are not lying idle.

Some one was wont to say: " I take heaven and earth to witness that I would rather be a worm of the dust in God's will, than a seraph in heaven contrary to that will."

I would rather, in conformity with God's will, do nothing and be a martyr of inactivity, than, out of it, to convert the whole world, and become a martyr of faith.

Rather, in conformity with God's designs, will I conceal myself under a bushel in some

miserable nook than, outside of those designs, shine as a star in the heavens.

Rather be a clown in God's will, than work miracles out of it.

Wherever I am and whatever I do, if I but correspond to the divine good pleasure, I am sufficiently great and rich, happy and wise.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE MORTIFICATION OF THE PALATE.

1. He that does not know how to govern his appetite, will be easily overcome by the evil fiend, and led on the broad road to perdition.

Catering to the palate is the mother of general effeminacy, a fruitful soil for vain dreams, a cause of impure emotions, and a source of carnal desires.

It unnerves the soul by satiating the body, entices to wantonness, produces impatience, inconstancy, disdain, and arrogance.

Would to God one did not so often have sad experience of this kind, even in religious communities.

How much stronger would our will-power be, how much greater our fervor for the honor of God how much more edifying our

intercourse, how much purer our conscience, if it were otherwise.

But because many yield to and serve the lust of the appetite, it produces in them relaxation of the religious spirit with its attendant consequences, discontent, complaint, indolence, and airs that do not edify.

How will any one be able to keep "the spirits of malice and powers of darkness" at bay, if he has not so far succeeded as to overcome and restrain the weakest of all adversaries?

For although this fault often causes great damage, still it is more easily overcome than many others.

2. He that grants too much indulgence to the appetite, is unable to pray well, or to meditate devoutly.

The carnal man has no understanding and no taste for spiritual things. All that is not sensual causes him weariness and disgust.

The soul of a carnal-minded man is like a feather sticking in the mire. It is impossible for it to free itself and be wafted upward by the breath of the Divine Spirit.

The quiet disposition of soul required for prayer and meditation presupposes a high degree of mortification.

When, therefore, one indulges too abundantly in corporal nourishment, he rejects spiritual, and renders himself unfit to be favored by God with heavenly comforts.

With what right can you say that you desire spiritual visitations and consolations, if you are so eager for comforts of quite another nature? Sensual and inordinate gratifications are entirely opposed to the religious spirit.

First, free yourself of the faults and imperfections that bar the entrance to divine favors into your heart; it will then become possible for you to pray with fervor and devotion and to taste heavenly sweetness.

Prepare yourself by fasting and abstinence, and you will soon hunger for the Bread of life.

It was thus all the saints prepared themselves for making a good prayer: they slept little, fasted much and were ingenious in mortifying their flesh. Communing with God

was sweet to them, in consequence of their great familiarity with Him.

3. He that pursues an opposite course will make no progress either in contemplation or the active life. He will rather become unfit, and useless for numberless labors.

A well-fed body is lazy, inert, and obstinate. It clamors for rest and sleep.

It may even become weak and infirm, from the effect of excessive enjoyment of food and drink, so that it cannot labor as it should in the service of God.

Among all that have done many and great things for God's honor and the salvation of souls, you will not find one who did not first accustom himself to the strictest frugality; yes, none that did not perseveringly lead a penitential life. Moderation means abstinence from what is prohibited; the penitential spirit goes further, and denies itself even what is permitted or due to it. It causes itself pain, for example, by fasting and the discipline.

Immoderation drives God away, scandalizes neighbors, and enervates soul and body.

Much that is beautiful is planned but not carried out; much that is good is spoken, but without reaching the heart of the hearers.

The spirit that gives life to words is wanting, and this spirit God withholds from the immortified and sensual.

Should you see that God sometimes employs imperfect men for the conversion of sinners, let it not lead you astray; remember that God will even make a dumb animal, a beast of burden, speak with a human voice, to stop the folly of a prophet (2 Pet. ii. 16). Both cases must be regarded as great miracles.

4. Moderation, on the other hand, contributes to make us useful to the neighbor. It renders our judgment of human life and our attention to divine doctrine keener and more penetrating.

It not only restrains the appetite, but humbles pride also, rouses from a state of indolence, curbs the imagination, and elevates heart and mind to the contemplation of divine things.

Moderation excites hunger for spiritual nourishment, unfolds to us the mysteries of

Scripture, awakens a readiness for labor, endurance, self-control, obedience, and humility.

Moderation draws down upon us the blessing of heaven and puts the tempter to shame. Does not St. Peter say: "Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour"? (1 Pet. v. 8.)

Finally, moderation is also beneficial to the body. It preserves it from many ailments and indispositions.

If you take up the Lives of the Saints, you will find that the great St. Anthony, the abbot, St. Paul, the hermit, and very many others reached an uncommonly great age; and yet they were not content to observe moderation most conscientiously, but led extremely severe and penitential lives.

5. Therefore, be not led astray. Prove yourself and, if you find that you still in any way flatter your palate, be ashamed of such childishness. Begin now, at least, in good earnest to deny yourself.

The body does not require dainties, lux-

uries, and varieties. Many people through necessity have to content themselves with very poor and moderate fare, but at the same time, they enjoy good health.

Remember, also, that you are poor and engaged in the service of a poor Master. By this reflection, you will feel yourself elevated and incited to great moderation.

O if we sought but to imitate Christ's example! Then we would be ashamed to be miserable servants of our body.

Let us often say to ourselves: Christ has for my sake suffered hunger and thirst. What more unjust, then, than for me not to be at least cheerfully moderate for Christ's sake!

6. But, perhaps, some one is so imperfect, so epicurean in his taste that, by talking on the subject, he lowers the standard of conversation and desecrates the devout entertainments of his brethren.

The pleasures of the table should never be the subject of our conversation: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. xiv. 17).

Unbecoming in the mouth of a religious are all complaints of food and drink. Yea, every expression that savors of attention to the palate.

"For where your treasure is there also is your heart." Now, these words come from the heart: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Luke vi. 45). How degenerate in a religious to set his heart on food and drink, and make them the subject of conversation!

Let us speak of God, not of eating and drinking;—of spiritual enjoyments, not of sensual pleasures;—of eternal consolations, not of perishable indulgence.

Then shall all our conversations be edifying and useful to ourselves. We shall make progress in the love of God and in knowledge of things divine.

CHAPTER X.

SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION.

1. So great is the sweetness of spiritual gifts and the interior visits of Our Lord, that even they who enjoy them are unable to describe, or even to comprehend them.

At no time are we so well disposed to good as at the time of such a visitation.

At no other time do we so readily and generously offer ourselves to God, that He may do with us what He pleases.

At no other time do we, with like joy, offer ourselves and all our inordinate inclinations in sacrifice to God.

Then everything comes easy to us, nothing deters us from entering on the way of the highest sanctity.

2. Yes, we then taste the perfect happi-

ness of a soul that gives itself entirely and without reserve to God's unlimited service in disgrace, privation, and suffering.

How great this is we then fully comprehend! We regard it with as much interior contentment as if, already saints and freed from the leaden weight of the body, we were enjoying that wonderful bliss.

Should we have to pray longer than usual, we do not grow weary; indeed, we gladly do so for the space of two or three hours.

3. Distracting thoughts do not disturb us, our spirit does not tire, although its undivided attention is absorbed in itself, and it is not in the least strained in the peaceful meditation of heavenly things.

What maintains, refreshes, and quickens the spirit in this state comes from above and affords it agreeable occupation.

We then clearly penetrate the wiles of the tempter, conceive strong resolutions, and say to God from the heart, and not merely from the lips: "I am Thy servant."

It appears to us as if God drew us to His

holy service in an undreamed-of, quite peculiar, and indescribable manner.

4. Usually, we cannot say what we have done for God, that we should deserve consolation so sweet.

God, indeed, comforts whom and when He will; however, as a rule, He imparts spiritual joy in consideration of this or that good work and the earnest preparation of the heart.

If we attentively run over our life in retrospect, we shall find that heavenly consolations were accorded us whenever we prayed with the greatest humility and purity of intention.

Or when, for the honor of God, we have done something against which nature and the flesh rebelled, thus proving ourselves liberal towards Him. This liberality induced Him to show Himself generous towards us.

5. Certainly, not from ourselves proceed this facility and joyfulness in doing good, which at such times we feel.

Nor can we see how so astonishing a fulness of sweetness, so great recollection and

elevation of spirit could proceed from any other source than God alone, who is "the God of all consolation."

Such blessings are so great that, during their enjoyment, the thought forces itself upon us, that it were good to be a saint if only for the sake of the temporal happiness imparted. With St. Peter, we are tempted to cry out: "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

Let us build here three tabernacles, one for the memory, one for the will, and one for the understanding.

Happy self-denial that draws down such blessings upon us!

It is worthy of striving for. To its practice we are indebted for so high a good and so great sweetness!

Blessed the fervor of prayer, whereby God strengthens us for the combat against evil, and confirms us in the hope that we shall yet arrive at sanctity!

6. Do you wish to be visited by God? Then be fervent in His service. Be fervent in praying and doing penance. Be not "as a man that tempts God."

For he would really tempt God who should expect the sweetness of heavenly comfort from Him without preparing himself rightly for His visitation, yea, even in spite of his daily yielding to useless distractions.

But if you have prepared a dwelling for Him and He comes to you really, with the fulness of His joys and consolations, then, beware of self-exaltation. This would turn out ill for you.

When God visits and consoles us, we often resolve upon great things, and fancy we are already delivered from all evil propensities.

But no; they are still alive, though silent for a short time, like dogs, which cease barking only while they are eating.

Do not think you are holy, because you have good desires and resolutions; for desiring and resolving are not doing.

CHAPTER XI.

OF BROTHERLY LOVE.

1. "THIS is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John xv. 12).

Love your brother for Christ's sake, if your first-born Brother, Christ, is to find pleasure in you.

He may be very imperfect and, by nature, anything but attractive; still you must love him all the same, to comply with the command of Our Lord. Does He not love you with equal sincerity, in spite of all your sins and failings?

Ah, how deserving of compassion are certain religious who regard themselves as spiritual men, and who wish to devote themselves to foreign missions! They long to go to distant parts of the world, to devote themselves

to apostolic labors among savages, yet, meantime, they are greatly wanting in the charity due to those of their own household.

Your brother, who dwells under the same roof with you, eats at the same table, lives under the same rule and discipline, is he not nearer to you than all the savages in the world ?

Learn, therefore, first to exercise love towards your brethren, if you would make yourself useful to others by the exercise of charity.

Why seek difficult and conspicuous works of charity among distant nations, so long as you have not learned to bear patiently with the faults of your brethren ?

As yet you are unable to accept a cross word sweetly. How, then, will you be prepared to shed your blood ?

2. "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another" (John xiii. 35).

Consider the nobility and dignity of charity. It makes you a disciple of Christ, and marks you out as such.

Now, as nothing can be more desired by man than the certainty that he is in reality a disciple of Christ, we must carefully preserve and nurture charity.

As nothing is more necessary to our neighbor than the knowledge and conviction that we belong to Christ, we are bound to give him the example of charity.

So great is the convincing power of solid acts of Christian charity that they of themselves suffice. There is no need of words to gainsay the prejudices of worldly prudence.

Love, indeed, inflames heaven. It elevates men above themselves, and gives them a trait of greater similarity to God: "For God is charity" (1 John iv. 8).

3. "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5).

If you cannot bear patiently with the faults of others, console them in affliction, and assist them in difficulties, you are wanting in the right kind of charity.

Do you seek to procure for yourself what

is better and easier ? do you refuse to bear the burdens of others ? do you take pains to avoid what displeases you in others ? Then you have not the right kind of charity.

Do you regard yourself as better than others ? If your manner, your style of speaking are not modest, friendly, even affectionate, you know not what true love is.

Why do you dispute with your neighbor over indifferent, insignificant matters that do not at all concern you ? Listen to St. Paul: "But the servant of the Lord must not wrangle: but be mild towards all men, apt to teach, patient" (2 Tim. ii. 24).

It is better to preserve charity than, to its detriment, show one's superiority in ever so brilliant a light.

4. The other virtues, without charity, cannot please God, nor do they merit the name of virtue.

Patience is praiseworthy, humility is advantageous, courage worthy of commendation, moderation is glorious; but "If I have not charity, I am nothing."

Charity is the soul and crown of all other

virtues. By it we wish well to God for His own sake, and to our neighbor for God's sake.

O how easy it would be for you to love your brother, if you truly loved God! For this double love has but one and the same object, namely, God's infinite goodness. How, then, can you love God and, at the same time, be cold towards your brother?

How well you would be prepared to render every charitable service, if you remembered that your brother is loved by God, is a member of the same body as yourself, under the same head Jesus Christ!

Reflect on the following: If a single member suffers, are not all the others excited to the same through sympathy? If your foot is wounded, how anxiously you seek for a remedy, how constantly you apply it, how tenderly you treat the wound!

Act in the same way towards your brother, even though averse to his conduct; for you are bound to love your neighbor as yourself.

5. Reflect, therefore, what you have to do

to show yourself courteous and obliging towards all, to give no cause of discontent, and to preserve charity unbroken in all your words and actions.

There is question of bearing with the weakness, of responding, as far as possible, to the desires of all; if you are wanting in courtesy or patience, you will not preserve charity.

Away with particularities and exceptions! Perfect equality is girded by the stronger bond of love. Therefore, they who would secure perfect harmony and love, must adhere firmly to the common life, with its common labors and privations.

If something joyful and bright falls into your brother's life, regard it as happening to yourself, rejoice with him, congratulate him *ex corde.* On the other hand, should misfortune come upon him, think it has befallen yourself; share his sorrow, express your sympathy sincere and heartfelt, and pray for him.

Should he request a favor of you, grant it. If anything is displeasing to him, let it pass.

If his ideas and views are contrary to yours, do not exasperate by opposing him.

In your intercourse with this dear brother, show yourself attentive, condescending, considerate, and humble of heart. Beware of contending, murmuring, making ironical or cutting remarks, as also of correcting, only in so far as your position renders it a duty incumbent upon you.

6. "A threefold cord is not easily broken" (Eccles. iv. 12). "A brother that is helped by his brother, is like a strong city" (Prov. xviii. 19).

If we are closely united by charity, the fiend may storm against us, the whole world persecute us, but we may always hope and have confidence.

But if mutual charity grows cold in our circle, there must needs be disquiet from without; for that bond broken, peace will depart.

Beware, then, of offending your brother or in any way sinning against mutual charity, lest you yourself suffer the effects of it.

If you have offended any one, be quick in

making reparation. Has any one offended you, pardon him, and be as anxious for his favor as if he were the wounded party. "In many things we all fail," and none of us live a long time without offending in something. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8).

When, therefore, we think others are wronging us, let us accept it as a punishment for our sins.

He that wishes to be borne with, must bear with others; he that desires to be loved, should love others; he that desires to be helped, should help others. "If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us" (1 John iv. 12).

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHOICE AND CULTIVATION OF THE VIRTUES.

1. So long as we are burdened with the weight of this mortal body, we cannot possibly reach perfection; hence, a choice is necessary, that we may not labor in vain.

Endeavor then to divine clearly in what virtue you should exercise yourself. This once decided, labor at it until, with God's help, you have distinguished yourself in its practice.

Certain virtues are very significant in daily life and necessary to all; therefore, you must with special fervor, apply yourself to acquire them.

The greater progress you make in gentleness, patience, modesty, moderation, humil-

ity, and the other virtues that must frequently be practised, the sooner will you become holy.

2. Some desire duties that are regarded by people of the world as more honorable and distinguished. They like to preach sermons, deliver orations, but only in the principal churches, and before a large circle of enlightened and eminent men.

They gladly visit the sick and hear confessions; but even in this their charity must be exercised upon the wealthy and refined.

Do you take care not to act or judge thus. To follow Christ, Our Lord, journeying with Him from village to village, is more perfect, and is attended with less danger, than to acquire in a large city the reputation of a scholar or a celebrated speaker.

It is better for you to seek out and comfort the poor, the lowly, and the simple, than the rich and the powerful, often less susceptible of your instructions and exhortations.

3. Some satisfy themselves with character-

istic virtues. Their practice is easier to them, requiring less effort, sometimes none at all.

But if self-denial and mortification are requisite, they do not even venture on the practice of any virtue. They lose courage, withdraw from the struggle, and think the best thing to do is to spare themselves.

Act not as they do; for they make no progress. They retrograde on the road of perfection because they heed not Christ's doctrine and example.

Christ did not call those happy that spare themselves and shun the brunt of the battle, but only those that mourn, and bravely enter the fight for justice.

Christ Himself would be "a man of sorrows" filled with shame and considered "a worm and no man."

He said: "I came not to send peace [upon the earth], but the sword" (Matt. x. 34), and "If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself: and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mark viii. 34).

4. Choose, then, for yourself what is most

opposed to nature, and you will advance more rapidly and more securely.

Apply yourself to the cultivation of patience, humility, and mortification in general. This is the way to perfection, this the foundation of the spiritual life.

When you have learned to overcome self, you will with facility acquire all the virtues: generosity, courage, obedience, brotherly love, and you will become master of your disorderly inclinations.

But if you do not strive to overcome self, you will be impatient in hardships and tribulations, sad and downcast, a burden to yourself and a scandal to others.

Wherever you are and whatever you do, there will always be occasion for combating. These occasions you cannot avoid. If, then, you have not learned to struggle with them, you will soon be vanquished.

5. Many, indeed, do exert themselves to acquire virtues, but to attain perfection in them—of this they do not even think. Their struggles for perfection, consequently, ever remain weak and unsatisfactory.

Let no one be content with mediocrity; let him never say: "It is enough!" His aim must be to reach the pinnacle of perfection.

It betrays want of courage and generosity if, in striving for virtue, one pauses half-way, too cowardly to aspire to higher degrees of holiness.

Let us seek to approach, as nearly as possible, to the ideal of perfection as shown us in Christ, so that each of us may be able to say: "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of Me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. iv. 16).

6. Our humility should be so great and so deep that it may dread no kind of confusion or humiliation.

Our obedience should be so great that it remain unwavering till death, respecting the watchword of our divine Leader: "Not My will but Thine be done" (Luke xxii. 42).

So great should be our love for our neighbor, even for our enemies and adversaries, that each of us with St. Paul might wish, if it were possible, "to be an anathema from Christ for my brethren, who are my kinsmen

according to the flesh," * and to offer our life for their redemption.

For all this has Christ done for us, leaving us an example that we follow in His footsteps.

But if, in striving after virtue, you are content with mediocrity, you have every reason to fear. At that degree there can be no stand-still. The motion would be retrograde and, if a serious trial came, you would be in imminent danger of perishing.

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* Romans ix. 3. Expressing "heroic, so to say, blind love that does not reflect whether or not its sacrifices be even possible."

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